

JERRY TODD'S TROUBLES IN DOUBLES

ALSO
THE SECRET OF
THE JADE THRONE



BY LEO EDWARDS

THE
JERRY TODD SERIES

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TROUBLES IN DOUBLES
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After being quarantined for smallpox in a "pest house", along with a Chicago detective, the detective lets slip that a mysterious party is willing to pay \$10,000 dollars for a certain pair of missing baby twins. Jerry Todd and his pals Scoop, Red and Peg believe that they can find the twins and capture the reward for themselves.

The fun begins when a hated classmate is also quarantined, the housekeeper gets sick, and their schoolteacher arrives ill. Throw in a fat man, a ghost, a crazy doctor, an overly diligent guard, and a mysterious couple, and you have the ingredients of a vintage Jerry Todd adventure.

If you're a Jerry Todd fan, don't miss this one

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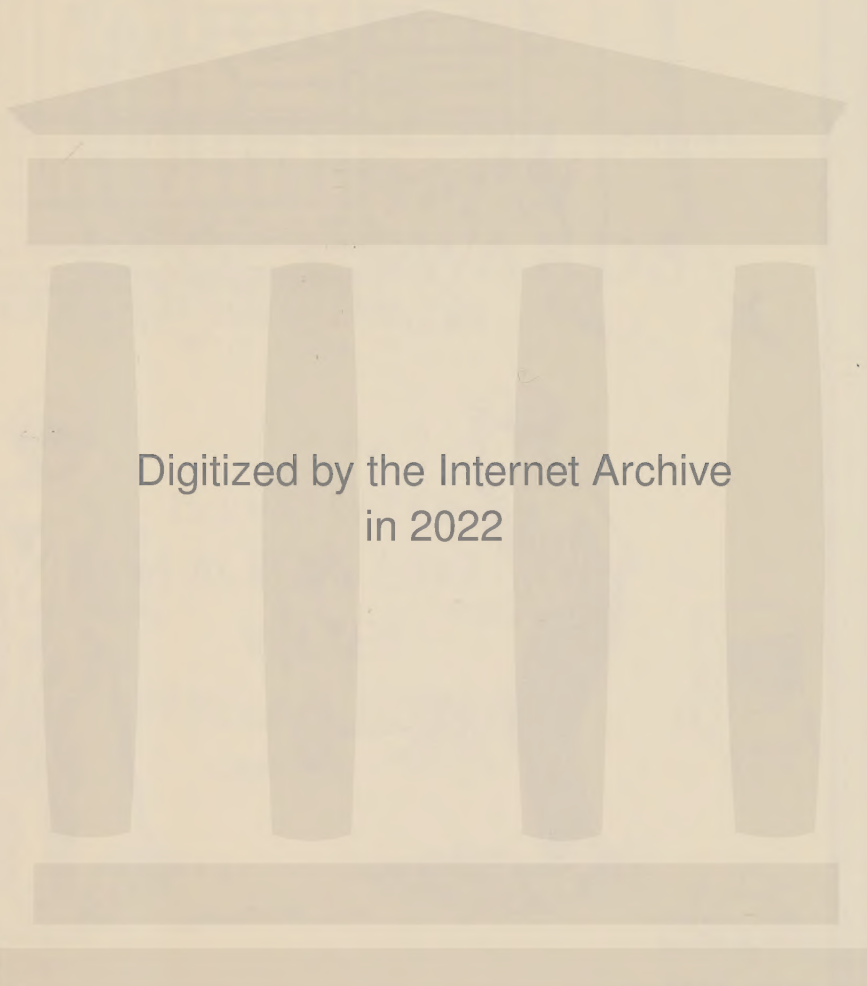
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DOUBLES**

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WHEN MOTHER GOT OUT THE HOSE WE BEAT IT.
Jerry Todd's Troubles in Doubles. Page 2
Frontispiece

**JERRY TODD'S
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IN
DOUBLES**

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**By
LEO EDWARDS**

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LEONARD FRANCIS

PUBLISHER : ALTADENA CA

Made in the United States of America

Copy 22 of 30

First Published, 1921, by
Boy Partners Magazine
Beloit, Wisconsin

Published, 1990, by
LEONARD FRANCIS
Altadena, CA

First Edition

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THE JERRY TODD SERIES

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JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
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TUFFY BEAN'S ONE RING CIRCUS
TUFFY BEAN AT FUNNY BONE FARM
TUFFY BEAN AND THE LOST FORTUNE

JERRY TODD'S

TROUBLES IN DOUBLES

CHAPTER I

It was saturday morning. I was out in the front yard turning cartwheels when Scoop Ellery came up on the run.

"Say, Jerry. I know how we can have some fun," says he eagerly. His eyes sparkled like they do when he gets an idea.

"How?" says I., letting him see I was interested.

"Let's go to simmons cave and play smoke-out," says he.

Right away I was tickled. And I was glad all over that it WAS Saturday and we didn't have to go to school. It would be a lot more fun playing smoke-out than sitting in a stuffy schoolroom with a grammar book in our hands.

I don't like school as well as dad thinks I should.

"Calc'late Peg Shaw will be in for it," says Scoop, thoughtfully.

"Yep; and Red Myers, too," says I.

Just then I noticed mother getting out the hose. I knew she would make me scrub the porches if I stuck around, so Scoop and I beat it down the street to get Red and Peg. We four fellows are regular pals. Where you see one of us you are pretty likely to see the other three. What one can't think up in the way of having fun the others can. Tutter is a small town, but I don't mind living there as long as I have Scoop and Red and Peg for pals.

Simmons cave is in the sandstone ledges about a mile northeast of town. It is about as big as our dining room. The entrance is so small that one has to stoop over to get inside. We frequently go there and play smoke-out, though we usually get a scolding when we return home with our clothes smelling like A smoked ham.

First, we light a fire in the back part of the cave. Then, we pile on green leaves to make a lot of smoke. The object of the game is to see who can remain in the cave the longest. At the start it is easy, because the smoke hangs to the ceiling. Then it settles lower and lower, until it touches the floor. About that time we have to dig for the outside air.

The quickest way to the cave is through Colonel Griffin's pasture, between the big grey-stone house and the pest house --an isolated two-story wooden building standing in the middle of the pasture. It is here that old Doc Marchant, the health officer, takes people that have the Flu and other contagious diseases.

We were cutting across the pasture, when Red gave a cry and pointed to the pest house.

"Look fellows! There's old Doc's flivver in the lane near the front door. he must have a contagious patient out here."

"Or maybe a smallpox case," says Scoop.

"Or diphtheria," says I wondering who was sick. I hadn't heard of any smallpox or diphtheria cases in town.

"Maybe there are two or three cases," says Scoop. "Gee, fellows, if it is smallpox, or something like that, and it gets to spreading through the town they'll close down the school. Oh boy!"

The prospect of the school closing down was a happy thought. We planned how we would take Red's tent and go camping up the canal near the wide-waters. We would take along our fishpoles and Scoop's rifle. It was going to be a lot of fun.

We were still talking about the camping trip when Colonel Griffin came walking along the creek bank, snapping an

occasional mustard weed with his dog-headed cane and absent-mindedly nodding his grey head. We figured he ought to know something about the patient at the pest house, because he lives closer to the place than any one else.

"Good morning boys. A fine fall day. Pest house you say? What's that?" He cupped his hand over his ear in a jerky sort of way.

"Who's sick?" yells Scoop, pointing to the pest house.

"Stranger," says the Colonel shortly. "Has smallpox according to Marchant. Taken sick at the hotel last night. Probably chickenpox. Marchant's an old fool. Dosen't know smallpox when he sees it. Hadn't ought to be allowed to doctor a sick cat, let alone people. Damn!"

When the peppery old gentleman passed on Scoop turned to us excitedly. "I bet you a stick of licorice that inside of a week the old schoolhouse 'll be closed tighter than 'an a drum," says he. "Oh boy! Guess we're in luck--what?"

We were so happy that we hopped and skipped the rest of the way to the cave. When we rounded Name-Rock Hill and came within sight of the entrance we paused dead still. Voices reached us from within. We figured it was either kids

or tramps. At a word from Scoop we dropped on to our stomachs in the weeds and grass. If it were tramps we didn't intend to take any chances.

"Gee, it's a lady," says Scoop in a startled whisper.

From where we lay we had a good view of the cave's interior. We could see the woman sitting on the floor within the entrance, holding two babies in her lap. They appeared to be about a year and a half old, and looked so much alike we knew right away they were twins.

"This is a nice mess," says a deep, gruff voice. And when we squinted into the shadows at the back of the cave we saw a man pulling away at a pipe. "We were fools to consent to the plan," says he. "First thing we know we'll both land in jail."

"I can't believe that will happen," says the woman in a tired voice, hugging the babies tight as they began to whimper.

"Huh!" says the man with a growl. "How far did we miss getting caught yesterday when the detective got the suitcase away from us? He's hot on our trail; and he'll get us I tell you. For all we know he's directly outside the cave this very minute."

The woman turned a startled glance in our direction and we ducked quick as scat.

"Gee!" says Scoop with a gasp. "That

was a narrow escape for us."

"Who are they?" says Peg looking puzzled.

"Search me," says Scoop. "They don't belong in Tutter, that's a cinch. But I don't believe there tramps. They don't look it--they look too clean and too dressed up. Besides, you don't see tramps toting babies around with them."

"Did you hear what they said about jail?" says I.

"And about a detective?" says Red. "I bet they're a couple of crooks," says I.

"The woman doesn't look like a crook," says Scoop.

"But they talk like crooks," says I.

"Maybe there going to rob the savings bank," says Red, his eyes big and round.

Every freckle on his face seemed to stand out.

"Or the post office," says I.

"S-h-h-h!" says Scoop motioning for us to keep quiet. "They're talking again."

"I think we ought to drop the twins somewhere and beat it," says the man. He was walking back and forth with his hands behind his back. His pipe left a trail of smoke behind him.

"But I promised--"

"Hang your promises! Send her a telegram. Let her fight her own battles. We can wire her from the little burg

down the track. You stay here with the kids and I'll go and fix it up."

"Oh, no!" says the woman in a frightened way. "Don't leave me alone. What would I do if the detective came while you were away? Please!"

"We'll both go," says the man. "I guess we can risk it."

At that the woman got up and buttoned jackets around the babies. She handed one of them to the man. Then the two of them came out of the cave and trailed around the hill in the direction of Tutter. They passed within a few feet of where we were hiding in an oak clump. I was scared for fear they would detect us; but they didn't.

CHAPTER II

When the man and woman were out of sight we went into the cave and talked the matter over. After what we had overheard it was plain to us that they were up to some kind of crooked work. What could it be? We tried to figure it out, but didn't seem to be able to find the answer. Scoop said that the twins probably had something to do with it, and suggested that we tell Bill Hanley what we had overheard when we got back to town. Bill is our policeman.

We searched the cave for clues and buried treasure. Thinking that we had discovered the hang-out of a band of robbers. All we found, though, was a dirty handkerchief and a short wax candle. That was disappointing. Scoop Threw the handkerchief on the fire that Peg had started and put the candle in his pocket.

Pretty soon we were having a high old time fanning smoke and all thought of the man and woman passed out of our minds. Scoop stayed in the cave the longest. When we dragged him out by the heels he had his coat wrapped about his head. We all smelled pretty smoky, so we undressed and played cannibal while our clothes aired out.

Cannibal is a good game. Red said he wanted to be chief, so we helped him make a crown of oak leaves. By lighting the wax candle that we had found in the cave and letting the melting wax drip on to the backs of his hands we spotted him up in fine style.

"I think a chief ought to be spotted all over," says Scoop, standing back and looking Red over critically.

"Sure," says Peg with a grin. "On the stomach and everywhere."

"I guess not," says Red, flaring up. "You poor simps ain't going to put none of that hot wax on MY stomach. Not so you can notice it, you ain't."

"Aw, go on; don't be a scardy calf." says Scoop.

"I ain't a scardy calf, and you know it. But the darn stuff is hot. Gee-miny Christmas! My stomach ain't made of leather."

"I guess a few drops won't kill you."

"Course not," says Peg. He was grin-

ning from ear to ear.

"Let's try it, Red," says I coaxingly.

Red is a gritty little cuss, so pretty soon he said we could go ahead and try a spot or two. He told us if it didn't hurt so terribly much he might let us spot him all over.

"Lay down on your back," says Scoop.

"Go easy, fellows," says Red, stretching out.

"All ready," says Scoop, tipping the candle just enough to let a big spot of wax spatter on to Red's stomach.

"Judas Priest!" he yells, doubling up. For a moment he looked wild.

"Lay still," says Scoop. "How do you expect me to do a real fancy job with you wiggling around like an angleworm?"

"I've had enough," says Red with a groan, rubbing his stomach.

"Just one more drop," says Scoop coaxingly.

"Not so you can notice it. Get away,"

But Scoop was determined. Watching his chance he let Red have another big drop. Red let out a wild yell and kicked like a bucking broncho.

"Water," he cried. "I'm on fire!"

We couldn't get the candle within ten feet of him after that, so we gave up on the idea of spotting him all over and went ahead with the game. We tied Peg to a tree, because he was the cap-

tured missionary. Then Scoop and I got long willow spears and danced around him, kicking up the sand and yelling: "Oogly, oogly, oogly, ooh!" Red was supposed to sit on the throne, which was an oak stump, but he said it was more fun to dance, so he got a spear and joined in.

Whenever we jabbed at Peg with the spears he let out an awful yell. That was part of the game. Of course we weren't supposed to actually jab him--just pretend. Red, though, did actually jab him in the ribs. This made Peg sore, so we quit playing cannibal and dressed.

"Gee fellows, look at my hands." says Red. Where he had picked off the wax spots his hands were covered with red blotches.

"Why, you look as though you've got the measles," says Peg with a giggle.

"Or smallpox," says I, giving Red the laugh.

"Did you say SMALLPOX?" says Scoop quickly, examining Red's hands. "By jinks, fellows, it DOES look as though it might be smallpox, according to pictures I've seen in doctor books. Say I know how we can have a barrel of fun. Let's all spot our hands and go back to town. What do you say? Everybody'll be excited over the smallpox case at the pest house and when they see us they'll have a fit, thinking that's what's the

matter with us."

We thought that was a pretty slick scheme and took turns dropping hot wax on the backs of each other's hands. When we were nicely spotted we started back to town.

On main street we met miss Tidy Sweet who sews for mother. She is an old maid awfully skinny and homely, and when it comes to long-distance talking there isn't a woman in town who can hold a candle to her. She was tripping along as nice as you please, and when she saw us she almost threw a fit.

"Good heavens!" says she shrilly, her eyes popping out of her skinny face "What IS the matter with you boys?"

"Maybe it's smallpox," Says Scoop. He didn't say it WAS smallpox, so he didn't tell a lie.

"Smallpox," says she with a shriek. She backed off, then turned and scooted down the street. At the corner she met Mrs. Wheeler and another lady. From her excited gestures we knew she was telling them about our spots.

The wemen edged to one side when we approached them. They stared at us with startled eyes.

"What are you boys doing on the street?" says Mrs. Wheeler sort of snappy-like. "You ought to be in the pest house. The idea!--running around this

way spreading the disease."

"We ain't SURE it's smallpox," says Scoop. It was awfully hard for him to keep from laughing.

"Well I'm sure of it. And I'm going to take this matter up with the health officer, too."

It was a lot of fun scaring people. We kept on down main street, figuring we would cause a stampede when we came to the business section. Then we met old Doc Marchant, the health officer, who came rattling along in his flivver.

Doc Marchant is one of the funniest old codgers imaginable. He has lived in Tutter for years and years. The mayor appoints him health officer because neither of the other two doctors wants the job. Old Doc likes being health officer. It gives him importance. Some people say he's crazy. It is a fact he does some queer things. And if you try to tell him anything--good night! You might just as well talk to a stubborn mule.

I guess some of the woman we met on the street had telephoned to old Doc about us, because as soon as he saw us he hopped out of his rickety flivver. He has a wooden leg and looked awfully funny stomping toward us, his dirty linen duster trailing out behind. He carried his medicine grip, as though he were likely to need some first aid.

When he got a good look at us his jaw dropped and his watery eyes bulged.

"Jumpin' Jupiter!" says he breathing hard. "Why--this is astounding. Ain't you feelin' sick, boys?"

"No sir," says Scoop truthfully.

"Amazing!" says old Dock. "Why, with that rash you ought to be sick all over." He eyed us in a startled sort of way. We had him guessing, all right! Crackey! It was too funny for anything.

"Maybe it ain't smallpox," says Scoop.

"Of course it's smallpox," says old Doc decisively. "You can't fool an old hand like me. Run along now and jump into my auto."

I began to get scared.

"What for?" says I, looking for a chance to beat it.

"Never mind what for. Do as i tell you, young feller."

By this time Scoop was scared too. I guess he was beginning to think we were carrying the joke too far.

"But we ain't got smallpox," says he. "We're only fooling."

"Move," says old Doc grimly, pointing toward the flivver.

"But we ain't--"

"Move!" thunders old Doc, helping us along with his peg leg.

We moved. I'll say we did. We knew he meant business, and we got into the fliv-

ver just as he told us to. Then he drove down the street.

I figured he was going to take us home and tell our dads to give us a good flogging. But he didn't. What he did was a whole lot worse than that. He drove out of town, past Colonel Griffin's big house, and turned in at the lane leading to the pest house.

Scoops eyes stuck out like buckeyes.

"Good-night!" says he with a groan, every line of his face showing alarm. "He's going to shut us up with the small-pox patient."

Peg said something--I don't remember what it was. I was so scared I was stiff and cold all over. My heart was going thump! thump! thump! It seemed to be jumping up and down in my throat. I guess I would have given a hundred dollars if mother or dad had happened along just then and yanked me out of old Doc's clutches. A fellow doesn't appreciate what fine things mothers and fathers are until he gets caught in a predicament.

But there was no one there to help us except the housekeeper, Mrs. Maloney, and all she did was to help us out of the flivver and into the pest house. Old Doc told her we were in a serious condition. Under his directions she prepared four beds in a long room they called the ward. After giving us a hot bath and dosing us

with nasty-tasting medicine they made us go to bed.

"Sure, now be good b'ys," said Mrs. Maloney gently, tucking us in. "If you take your medicine as you should and don't exert yourselves you'll be well in a jiffy."

"But we ain't got the smallpox." says Scoop, his voice trembling with despair. "We ain't sick Mrs. Maloney. Honest we ain't. It's all a joke."

A troubled look flashed across her motherly face and she heaved a sigh.

"Sure, the poor b'y is out of his head," she murmured as she left the room, closing the door behind her. We could hear her going down the stairs, each step creaking beneath her weight.

Can you imagine anyone being in a worse predicament than we were at that very moment?

CHAPTER III

OUR FOLKS SOON learned about us being shut up in the pest house. Every few minutes the telephone jingled and we could hear Mrs. Maloney talking. We gathered from her part of the conversation that our people were pretty much excited over what had happened to us. That isn't surprising. They thought we had the smallpox, and from what she told them over the telephone it is a wonder they weren't scared to death. According to her story we were in a fair way to kick the bucket.

When she came up stairs to give us our medicine we again tried to make her realize that there was nothing the matter with us. Failing, we decided that the only thing left to do was to make our escape from the pest house that night. Once we were back in our homes we figured our people would stand by us when they learned that our blotches were wax spots and not

smallpox rash.

Just as dusk was setting in Old Doc rattled up in the pest house lane in his flivver. When he stomped upstairs his arms were filled with bundles. Mother sent my best pajamas and enough clean handkerchiefs to last me a week. Wrapped up in the pajamas was a box of chocolates and in the box a note:

Dear Jerry:

You can't imagine how worried I am. But I am hoping for the best. Please be a little man, Jerry, and do just as the doctor tells you. He has promised to let me know if you get worse and in that event I will come to you. Nothing can keep me from you, Jerry, If you need me.

Mother

P.S. The candy is from your father who is sorry he scolded you at the supper table last night.

A lump came up in my throat when I read mother's note. I felt pretty guilty to think that she was worrying and there wasn't anything the matter with me. But though I wanted to ease her mind right away the only thing i could do was to wait for Mrs. Maloney to go to bed so that the way would be clear for us to make our escape.

Shortly after the big grandfathers clock

in the lower hall struck nine we heard Mrs. Maloney climb the stairs and go into her room. When every thing was still we slipped out of our beds and dressed. As we crept past her door we could hear her snoring. The smallpox patient was somewhere on the second floor, but we didn't bother to find out where. We were more concerned with making our escape.

Noiselessly we tiptoed down the stairs and along the hall to the front door. It was pitch dark and we had to pick our way slowly. When we arrived at the front door we found it locked. Mrs. Maloney evidently taken the key upstairs with her because it wasn't in the lock.

"We'll try the kitchen door," says Scoop in a hollow whisper.

It was awfully spooky in the still, dark hall. We kept close together so as not to become separated. Every time the floor creaked we half expected something to reach out and nab us. Once Red sneezed and I just about wilted.

But there was no escape for us by way of the kitchen door. Like the front door it was locked and the key was missing. On the point of raising a window, we heard footsteps on the porch. Then the door-knob rattled.

"I bet it's Old Doc," says Scoop with a gasp. "Beat it back to bed fellows."

We made quite a racket ascending the

stairs. Before we could get undressed and into bed again Mrs. Maloney came in to the room carrying a lamp. She had on a white nightgown. A ruffled night-cap covered her head. Her eyes blinked sleepily and she was cross.

"What the devil do you mean gettin' out of your beds?" says she sharply, holding the lamp above her head and fixing us with a scowl.

"We were just exercising," Scoop says lamely.

"Indeed! Well, cut out the exercisin' and keep to your beds. And you Jerry Todd; Ain't it enough that you have your poor Ma worried sick over your condition without tryin' to bring on a relapse? If you b'ys give me any more trouble this night, sure I'll call the guard."

"The which?" says Scoop, looking at her sharply.

"The guard," says Mrs. Maloney

"What guard?"

A grim smile flashed over her face.

"Sure, the guard is a little idea of the doctor's. You'll find him patrollin' the premises with a shotgun over his shoulder. He ain't needed so much to keep people OUT as he is to keep people IN. So don't get any foolish ideas about skinnin' out for home."

When Mrs. Maloney went back to bed we

got up and went to the window to see if she were telling the truth about the guard. The moon was shining and we could see the yard plainly. While we stood there looking down a stoop shouldered man came around the corner of the pest house with a shotgun in his arms, ready for instant use.

Scoop gave a gasp.

"Gee-miny! I'ts Paddy Gorbett," says he.

"He's a crazy old stiff. I wouldn't put it past him to shoot to kill. I'll bet it was him we heard on the back porch. We had a narrow escape, fellows."

"I'll say we did," says Peg.

We watched Paddy until he disappeared around the corner; Then we lined up dispiritedly on the edge of Scoop's bed. The outlook wasn't very promising.

"It looks as though we're here for keeps," says Scoop. He was thoughtful for a moment, then gave a wry laugh. "Do you know, fellows, I've just about made up my mind to grin and make the best of it. We've been wanting a chance to get out of going to school; and it's a cinch we won't have to go back to school as long as Old Doc believes we have the smallpox." "Cracky! I never thought of THAT," says Red.

"Neither did I til this very minute," says Scoop.

"I guess we ain't so bad off as we thought we were," says Peg.

"I should say not. I'm beginning to

think we're lined up for a lot of fun. In fact, fellows, I'm beginning to LIKE it. "Oh, boy! While we're loafing around and having a good time the other kids will be grinding away in school."

"Including the Carey cousins," says Red.

"Don't mention those poor simps," says Scoop With a growl. "The very thought of them makes me sick."

We don't have any time for the Carey cousins. Just Because they live on the hill they think they're better than every body else. Clarence Carey is the meanest, though Howard is bad enough. We call the kids that live on the hill the Carey gang.

The Carey cousins know enough to keep out of our way, especially since the day Clarence tattled on Scoop at school. That made us pretty hot. Scoop put a mouse in Miss Gardner's desk, and when she found it she pretty nearly had a fit. Gee, how we laughed! But we didn't laugh when Clarence tattled and Scoop got flogged. We threatened to get even with him. Miss Gardner always makes it soft for him in his numbers, because she lives on the hill, too. Scoop and Red and Peg and I don't like her a little bit.

While we were sitting on the edge of Scoop's bed talking an automobile turned in at the lane. We were pretty sure it

was Old Doc's flivver, because it was missing on one cylinder. The car came to a grinding pause within a few feet of the front door and we heard Old Doc giving orders to the guard. Then the door-bell rang and Mrs. Maloney, muttering something about a lame knee, went down and let him in.

Not wanting to miss anything, we tiptoed into the hall and leaned over the railing. Old Doc was helping someone in through the door.

"I'll bet it's another patient," says Scoop excitedly.

Just then Mrs. Maloney held the light just right and we saw who it was. For a moment we were speechless with surprise. Then Scoop gave a happy cry.

"Now we ARE in luck." says he, snapping his fingers. "Ch, boy! We're going to have some real fun if I know anything about it. The first thing on the program 'll be initiation. Beat it back to your beds, fellows, and think up something real jazzy. It's Clarence Carey."

CHAPTER IV

We WERE tickled to see Clarence. We hadn't forgiven him for tattling on Scoop the day the mouse stirred up things in the schoolroom. Now we were going to have a chance to get even.

When old Doc and Mrs. Maloney came in supporting Clarence we were back in our beds. There were six single beds in the ward and Mrs. Maloney fussed around one of the unoccupied ones getting it ready for Clarence.

"All right doctor," says she and the two of them helped Clarence out of his clothes and into bed.

We were sitting up taking it all in. When Clarence saw us his eyes bulged. I guess at first he thought he was having a bad dream. When he saw it really was us he tried to get out of bed.

"I ain't going to stay here," says he.

"Lay down and be quiet," says Mrs.

Maloney impatiently.

"I want to go home."

"Well, you can't go home; so be quiet."

Old Doc stomped across to where we were and inspected our tongues.

"How you feelin'?" says he, squinting at us over the tops of his spectacles.

"A whole lot better," says Scoop, which was the truth. Now that we were certain that we wouldn't have to go back to school for some time we were pretty happy.

"Your temp'ature's normal," says Old Doc. "That's a good sign."

"I think by to-morro we'll be able to sit up a little bit," says Scoop, giving me a wink.

"Not impossible at that," says Old Doc. "You're havin' it awful light."

"Say Doc."

"Well?"

"Ain't it pretty near breakfast time?"

"Tut! Tut!" says Old Doc with a grunt. Then he crossed to Clarence's bed.

"Now, young man, quiet down and go to sleep," says he gruffly. "You mustn't mess around and keep these other boys awake."

"They ain't no friends of mine," says Clarence, scowling at us. "Either take 'em away or take me away."

"Nonsense! They're nice quiet boys. now go to sleep."

Mrs. Maloney went out of the room and down the stairs with Old Doc stomping along at her heels. Shortly after that we heard the

flivver rattle out of the yard. When she was back in her room we crawled out of our beds.

"I wasn't kidding Old Doc about being hungry," says Scoop.

"I'm hungry too says Peg.

"Maybe we can find something down in the kitchen," says Scoop. "Let's slip downstairs and give the pantry the once over."

On the kitchen table we found a sack filled with nice big oranges. It didn't take long for us to get on the outside of them, with the exception of one that we saved for Clarence. We had a reason for being so generous.

"We'll save our peelings for him, too," says Scoop with a grin.

"I could eat some blackberry jam or something like that if I had it," says he. "Let's go down to the cellar and look around." says Scoop.

The cellar was awfully dark and a current of air, coming in through an open window, fanned out the lamp Scoop carried.

"Who's got a match?" says he.

"Here's one says Peg," says Peg, striking it on the cellar wall.

"Ouch! The darn chimney's hot," says Scoop.

"Take hold of it near the bottom," says Peg. Scoop did this, but before he could remove the chimney Peg's match

went out.

At that very instant Red clutched my arm and gave a screech.

"Lo-ok in the corner, he chattered."

"Its a pair of eyes," says Scoop, backing up and stepping on my toes.

"Ma-aybe it's a ti-iger. Hurry up and li-ight the la-amp," says Red.

"Tiger nothing. I bet it's a cat," says Peg.

But it wasn't. It was a toad--the biggest we had ever seen. I guess he had been living in the pest house cellar for years and years. When we held the lamp close to him he swelled up so big we thought he surely would burst.

"I bet he'd give a fellow warts, all right," says Scoop.

"Ain't it a fact," says Peg.

"Let's take him upstairs and put him in Mrs. Maloney's room," says Red.

"Nix," says Scoop. "We'll put him in Clarence's bed; that's what we'll do with him. Clarence 'll squeal good and plenty when he wakes up and finds a toad in his bed."

"Maybe he'll get warts all over his legs," says Red hopefully.

"There ain't a particle of doubt about it," says Peg. "Just look at the old boy. He's covered with warts, himself. I wouldn't like to wake up and find him bunking with ME."

When we returned to the ward we found Clarence still wide awake.

"Beat it," says he sullenly when we tipped over to his bed.

"How you feeling," says Scoop.

"Go chase yourself and leave me be."

"What's eating you," says Scoop with a growl. "We ain't going to kill you. say, Clarence ain't you hungry?"

"Naw," says Clarence turning his back to us.

"We've got an orange for you," says Scoop.

"Keep it."

"Better take it."

"What's the matter with it? Rotten?"

"Ain't nothing the matter with it. Here it is."

Clarence turned over and took the orange, inspecting it suspiciously.

"Very sick," asks Scoop.

"Maybe I am and maybe I ain't," says Clarence.

"Are you all spotted up?"

"Who wants to know?"

"I do."

"What for?"

"Aw, I got the smallpox, Clarence?"

"Say why don't you take a few days off and ask me a few questions?" says Clarence, giving Scoop a scowl.

"Bet we have more spots than you have," put in Red.

"I'll say we have," says Peg, displaying the backs of his hands.

"I ain't worrying over how many spots you've got," says Clarence. "Kiss yourselves good-night and leave me be."

After a bit we crawled into bed and waited for Clarence to go to sleep. He didn't know about the toad. On coming up from the cellar we carried the toad in an old strawberry box and dumped it into the dresser drawer when he wasn't looking.

When he was asleep we piled the sack full of orange peelings on the table besides his bed. It took us quite some time to get the toad tucked in under the covers. We had to move cautiously so as not to waken him.

"Now," says Scoop when he had everything fixed, "we can go back to bed and sleep in peace. You can bet that when he finds he's got a bedfellow he'll let us know about it. No need for us to keep awake."

So many things had happened in the past few hours I found it difficult to get to sleep. I kept thinking of Mother and Dad, and decided to call up Mother the first thing in the morning. I would let her know there was no cause to worry. Of course I could not let her know about the wax spots, because then we would be yanked out of the pest house and sent back to school. But it wouldn't do any harm to let her know that I was perfectly well.

Then I thought of my teacher, Miss

Gardner, and how chagrined she'd be when monday morning came and I didn't show up at school. She'd miss me, all right. I was glad. The old school bell could ring and keep on ringing for all I cared. I felt pretty contented when I pictured the other kids writing the multiplication table on the blackboard and me taking it soft and easy.

"Gee, I'm a lucky guy!" I mused. "I bet the other kids will be envious when they hear about us." It wasn't every kid that had a chance to be shut up in the pest house!

We didn't know how long Old Doc would keep us locked up in the pest house, but it would be several weeks. If he seemed inclined to let us out too soon we could easily have a "relapse" by putting more spots on our hands. The medicine wasn't an obstacle: Scoop had dumped it out of the window and refilled the glasses with coffee-colored water.

Just before I dozed off I recalled the man and woman we had seen at the cave. I wondered who they were and what they were doing with the twin babies. After what they had said about a detective being on their trail I was convinced they were crooks. But what was there game?

It came to me as I lay there that we hadn't told Bill Hanley, the Tutter policeman, or anyone else about what we had

overheard at the cave. But we could do nothing now. No doubt the man and woman were miles away by this time. We were soon to learn that wasn't the case.

In view of what happened later I sometime wonder if it would have made any difference if we HAD told Bill Hanley about the man and the woman and the twins. In that case things might have worked out differently, but I'm not so sure about it.

CHAPTER V

The following morning we were awakened by Clarence, who was screeching to beat the cars and kicking the bedclothes like fury.

Scoop hopped out of bed and rolled up the window shade, letting the early morning sunlight stream into the room.

"What's the matter Clarence?" says he, hiding a grin.

"There's a snake in my bed," says Clarence. his eyes bulging.

Mrs. Maloney was awakened by the racket. She came limping into the room, rubbing her lame knee.

"What's the matter now?" says she crossly.

"Its a snake," yells Clarence, bobbing up and down like a jumping jack.

"A what?" screeched Mrs. Maloney, beginning to look scared.

"A snake," cries Clarence. "It's in my bed."

We had tied the bedclothes down, so it was no easy matter for him to get out of bed. At length, he succeeded in freeing himself. He tumbled to the floor, the bedclothes falling on top of him.

Mrs. Maloney gave an angry snort when she saw the toad.

"You should be punished for your tricks," says she. "Take the warty thing out of here."

While Clarence was gingerly trying to lift the toad by one of it's legs, Mrs. Maloney spied the orange peelings. With a stormy face she took hold of Clarence by the ear.

"Pig! Eatin' all my oranges."

"I only ate one," says Clarence.

"One is it? One dozen you mean. Wait til the doctor hears of this night's work. Sure he'll use a stomach pump on you, or my name isn't Nora Maloney. And it's thinkin' I am that if you're able to gorge yourself on oranges you're able to go home. Sick? Bah! I dont believe you're sick. People who have the real smallpox don't go cuttin' monkey-shines. I'm goin' to put a bug in the doctor's ear when he comes this mornin'. Indeed I am!"

after Clarence had thrown the toad out of the window Mrs Maloney made him get back into bed.

"I'll get warts all over me," says he, holding back.

"Sure, you'll get something worse than warts if you don't move and move quick," says Mrs. Maloney sharply. "It's losin' my patience, I am."

When she was out of the room Clarence turned on us fellows with a scowl.

"You think you're smart," says he angrily.

"We admit it," says Scoop with a happy grin.

"You make me sick. I wish my gang was here. We'd fix you."

"We can lick your gang any day in the week," flared Red, doubling his fists.

"You'll have your chance, all right," says Clarence with a snarl. "Just wait; I'll get even."

Sunday was a quiet day. In the morning Old Doc came out to the pest house and inspected us carefully. He said we were improving wonderfully and consented to our getting up and dressing. Clarence was getting grouchy over the trick played on him and declined to get up. If he was sick he didnt show it in his actions. He was just as mean and smart-acting as ever. His face was covered with a pink rash, but I couldn't believe it was small-pox. Doc Marchant is an awful old bone-head. Look how we fooled him into thinking that our wax-candle spots were small-pox blotches! After church mother called up on the telephone and wanted to know

how I rested the night before. I told her I was getting along fine and hardly sick at all.

"I'm glad to hear that," says mother
"I won't have to worry now."

"No need of worrying," says I.

"I can't understand it," says mother
"Sometimes I think it isn't smallpox at all. Mrs. Myers feels the same way. I talked with her on the way home from church this morning. You know, Jerry, Doctor marchant is credited with getting things hopelessly mixed on occasion. We're intending to have some other doctor visit the pest house to examine you boys,"

I didn't know what to say to that. Gee whizz! It would be all off if one of the other doctors took us in hand. I mumbled something about our hands being spotted, and about Clarence's face being broken out. Then she says:

"Jerry, are you trying to beat the bush?"

"What do you mean?" I evaded uneasily.

"Are you keeping something from me?"

"You mean about us having the smallpox?"
says I.

"Answer me, Jerry: Do you believe really and truly, that you have the smallpox? Mrs. Meyers says she is suspicious, knowing how tricky Donald is. I'm beginning to feel the same way. I wish I could have a good look at you."

"You'd find me all spotted up," says I

quickly.

"With smallpox?"

"Old Doc says it's smallpox."

This seemed to settle the matter for mother. She was silent for a moment, then says:

"Pretty tough for you to be shut in this way, Jerry."

"Yes, I miss a lot of fun," says I.

"I wasn't thinking about fun; I was thinking about your school work," says she. "I don't like to have you miss school. You'll get behind."

"It can't be helped," says I, keeping my voice toned low so she wouldn't know how tickled I was.

"Maybe it would help if you did a little studying," says mother.

"You mean here in the pest house," says I.

"Yes," says mother. "I can send out some of your old books; and I'll get Mrs. Myers to send Donald's Books."

Good-night! I knew what Scoop and the others would say to a plan like that.

"I don't think we're well enough to do much studying," says I, not feeling any too happy.

"But you say you aren't sick."

"Studying might make us worse," says I. "I don't think we should take any chances."

"Maybe not," says mother. Then: "Is there anything I can do for you Jerry?"

"You might send another box of candy-- a bigger one," says I.

"Anything else?" says mother dryly.

"My baseball and bat and catching glove," says I.

"Go on," says mother.

"That's all I can think of for now," says I.

"Thought you might want your trapeze and boxing gloves and punching bag and croquet set," says mother. "If you're too sick to study you're too sick to play baseball. I'm going to hang up now, Jerry. Are you sure you haven't anything you want to confide in me?"

"I haven't a thing," says I.

"Be honest Jerry."

"I am honest," says I.

"Allright, son," says mother kind of disappointed-like; and she hung up the receiver. I was uneasy. Plainly, mother's suspicions were aroused. She's quick to catch on to things. I wondered what she would do.

We helped Mrs. Maloney get dinner. She said her knee was paining her and it seemed difficult for her to get around.

SCoop was paring potatoes with an apron tied under his chin. "Maybe you're catching the smallpox," says he.

"Smallpox nothin'," says Mrs Maloney.

"Sure it's the rhumatiz'. It's been botherin' me lately. A lot of good i'll be around here if it gets any worse."

After dinner she went to her bed. That night we had to get our own supper and wash the dishes and everything. Her knee pained her so she couldn't stand on her feet.

"It wasn't any fun cooking. We didn't know very much about it. It was hot work, too. About every ten minutes we would chase upstairs to ask Mrs. Maloney how to do this or how to do that.

"I'm glad we don't have to be cooks every day," says Red, stooping over to pick up pieces of a platter he had dropped.

"You and me, both, says Peg wiping his sweaty face on the dish-towel.

"I thought school was bad enough, but this is worse," says Red, tossing the pieces of the platter out of the back door.

"Ain't it a fact," says Peg.

"Lets not kick," says Scoop. We'll live through it; and tomorrow we'll take it easy. Mrs. Maloney says her knee 'll probably be all right by tomorrow."

CHAPTER VI

That evening we had our first look at the smallpox patient. He was in room number six. As we hadn't heard anything from him all day we thought he must be pretty sick. But he wasn't. He didn't seem to be any sicker than Clarence was, and had the same kind of a rash all over his face. We didn't like his appearance, especially his shifting eyes. He had a dishonest look.

"What's the matter with the queen of Killarney?" says he with a growl when Scoop and I took his supper up to him on a tray.

"The which?" says Scoop.

"The Irish mermaid with the six cyllinder gab."

We saw then that he ment Mrs. Maloney.

"She has a lame knee," says Scoop.

"She can't get around,"

"Nope. She's in bed."

"What are you kids doing here?"

"We're quarantined," says Scoop.

"For what?"

"Same as you; smallpox."

"Live in this town?"

"You bet."

The man stopped talking and busied himself with the food.

"This is a pretty nice town," says Scoop after a moment. I could tell from the tone of his voice that he was starting in to pump the man. Scoop is pretty slick at that. I figured it wouldn't be more than ten minutes before he knew who the man was and all about him.

"I say this is a pretty nice town," says Scoop a little louder, when the man failed to nibble at his bait.

"Huh!"

"Maybe it ain't as big as your town; but it's a pretty nice town just the same."

"What do you know about my town?" says the man, fixing Scoop with a scowl.

"You look to be a city man," says Scoop.

"Reckon you know a lot about big cities like Chicago."

"Well, that's where I live When I'm home," says the man.

"I know another drummer from Chicago," says Scoop.

"He sells incubators."

"What do you mean?---another drummer?"

"Ain't you one of those drummer fell-

ows?"

The man laughed roughly.

"Naw, I,m a preacher," says he.

"I would never have guessed it," says Scoop.

"Don't I look it?"

"Well, I never saw any CHICAGO preachers, so I can't tell," says Scoop.

This appeared to amuse the man. He chuckled as he bent over the tray. We knew he was kidding us about being a minister. He looked more like a burglar or outlaw.

"What are you doing in Tutter?" says Scoop.

"Preaching?"

"I just dropped in to look at the scenery," says the man.

"Is that so?" says Scoop getting huffy.

"Guess you won't strain your eyes looking at the scenery as long as Old Doc keeps you here in the pest house."

"Hang the old fool of a health officer," says the man with a growl. "He's got his nerve locking me up. Smallpox nothin'! I aint got the smallpox. It's just some kind of a rash,"

"Well, as long as you haven't got anything more important to do than rubber at the scenery, I guess it won't hurt you to stick around in here for a spell," says Scoop.

"Don't kid yourself," says the man.

"My time's worth money. I've got to get out of here and, and that's all there is to it. If I don't I'll loose a chance to pull down ten thousand dollars."

Scoops eyes bulged. Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money. I figured there wasn't much more than that in the Tutter savings bank.

"What do you mean?" says Scoop.

"Never mind what I mean. I know; and that's enough."

He began eating and we stood beside the bed and watched him. It wasn't every day we had a chance to see a man who could earn ten thousand dollars.

When he was through eating he looked us over sharply.

"Maybe you kids can help me." says he at length.

"To get the ten thousand dollars?" says Scoop breathlessly.

"Something like that."

"Just try us," says Scoop, his eyes sparkling.

"I came to town to locate a certain man and woman," says he.

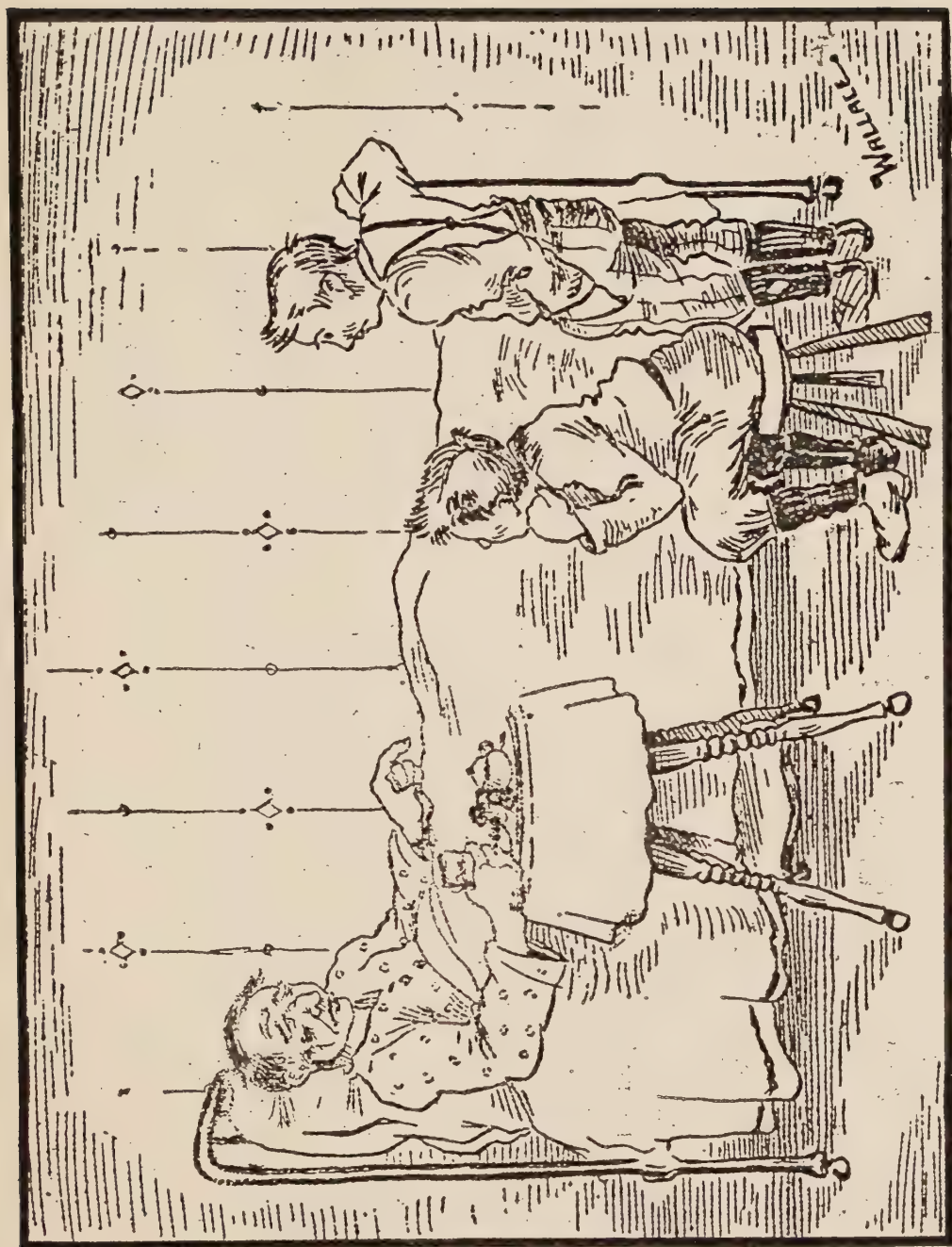
"Yes," says Scoop attentively.

"Seen any strange men and woman around here lately?"

"Yes," says Scoop again.

"When?"

"Yesterday."



"MY TIME'S WORTH MONEY," SAYS THE MAN.

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"Where did you see 'em?"

"In simmons cave."

"Where's that?"

"Just outside of town."

The man leaned forward and regarded Scoop searchingly.

"You ain't lying?"

"Honest injun."

"Did they have anything with them?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it?"

"A handgag," says Scoop.

The man gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Aw, shucks! Get out of here," he growled, shoving the tray toward us.

CHAPTER VII

When we were in the hall Scoop took me by the arm excitedly.

"Do you know who he's asking about Jerry?"

"The man and woman in the cave," says I.

"You guessed it. I just KNEW there was something queer about 'em."

"And when he asked you if they had anything with 'em he thought---"

"He thought I'd say twins; but I fooled him."

I thought hard for a moment trying to figure what connection there could be between the smallpox patient in number six and the man and woman we had seen in the cave. I didn't make much headway, except it occurred to me that the man in number six might be the detective.

"He may be kidding about the ten thousand dollars; but if he is telling

the truth I'd be willing to bet dollars to doughnuts that the twins have something to do with it," says Scoop.

"Why didn't you tell him about the twins?" says I.

Scoop looked me over sort of scornfully.

"Gee whiz, Jerry! is your brain groggy? If there's ten thousand dollars in the deal for HIM it ought to be worth something to US to keep what we know to our selves til we know more."

Red and Peg were pretty much excited when we told them about the man in number six and about the ten thousand dollars.

It was plain to us that we were face to face with a real mystery. Who was this man in number six? What was his business in Tutter? That the twin babies were involved, we hadn't a doubt in the world.

And as nearly as we could figure it out the smallpox patient was planning to get possession of them.

Just before dusk Old Doc called up on the telephone.

"How's the Carey boy?" says he.

"He's in bed," says I.

"Restin' easy?"

"He is as far as I know," says I.

"Have his bath?"

"Not today."

"Ought to have a warm bath. Where's Mrs. Maloney?"

I explained about her lame knee. Scoop stoop just in back of me taking it all in.

"Tell him we'll give Clarence his bath," says he with a grin.

"All right," says Old Doc, when I delivered Scoop's message.

"See that the water is good and warm. It'll bring out the rash."

"Leave it to us," says I.

"Paddy Gorbett show up yet?"

"He's out in front with his shotgun."

"Humph! That's all. I'll be out to see you first thing in the morning."

I hung up the receiver in a jiffy and beat it upstairs in company with the other fellows to break the glad news to Clarence that we were going to give him a bath.

"Go chase yourself," says he angrily. "I guess I know when I need a bath."

"Old Doc's orders," says Scoop.

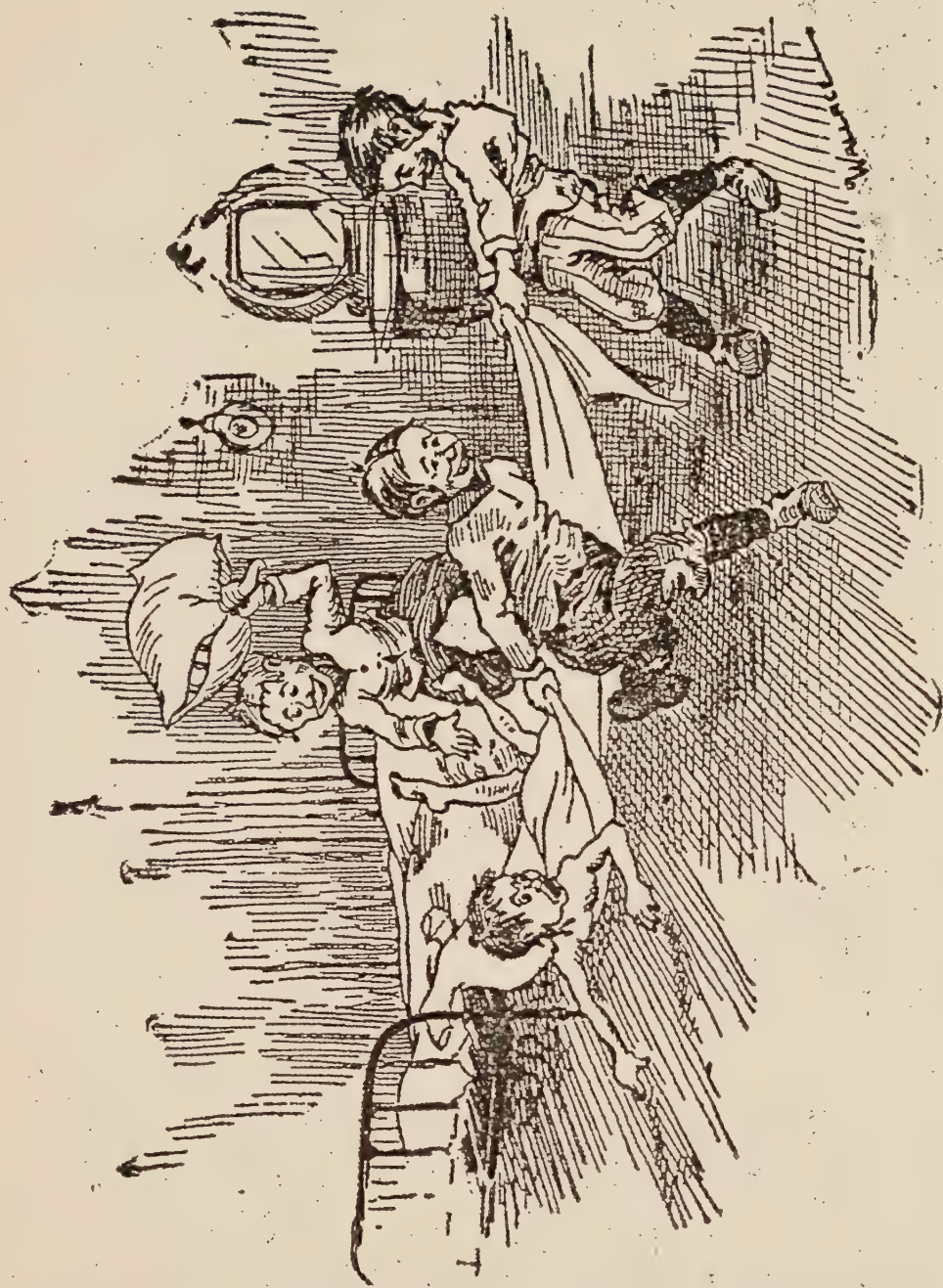
"I don't care a rap about that. I ain't going to take a bath. Get me?"

"We've got to do our duty," says Scoop. "It's Old Doc's orders, and we've got to do as he says."

"Beat it, I tell you. I don't want a bath."

"Take hold of him fellows," says Scoop."

Red jerked away the covers and



WE ROLLED HIM IN A SHEET AND DRAGGED HIM TO THE BATHROOM.

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Scoop and I stripped him of his pajamas. He scratched and kicked and even tried to bite us. Finally we rolled him in a sheet and dragged him along the floor to the bathroom. Peg was there and had the tub half full of warm water.

"W-ough!" yells Clarence. "You idiots! It's hot!"

"That's the way Old Doc ordered it," says Scoop.

"We ought to have a brush," says Red.

"I know where we can get one," says I. "I saw one under the kitchen sink."

"Must be a floor brush," says Scoop.

"What's the difference?" says Peg. "I guess washing Clarence with it wont hurt it none." As I scooted down the stairs he called after me: "Bring up the mop, too, Jerry."

"Where do we start in first?" says Scoop, when I was back in the bathroom with the brush.

"We might start at the head and wash down," says Peg. "Or at the bottom and wash up," says I.

"Oh won't you guys catch it for this!" says Clarence.

"Let's start at the top," says Red.

"All right," says Scoop, reaching for the soap.

"I won't stand for this," yells Clarence, trying to break away and scramble out of the tub.

"Sit down for it then," says Scoop, soaking him on the nose with the sponge.

We soaped Clarence from head to foot and all the way back. Then we rinsed him off. He looked pretty clean when we got through with him, though he didn't look very happy. He was nice and pink.

"Just wait," says he, when we dumped him into his bed. "I'll get even with you guys for this. My time's coming."

The bath had taken considerable time and it was after ten o'clock when we turned in. Clarence lay perfectly still, as though he were sound asleep. But I was soon to learn that he was faking.

About an hour later I awakened and heard him dressing. He evidently had made up his mind to skin out for home. I snickered to myself when I pictured what would happen to him the moment he poked his nose out of the front door. He didn't know that Paddy Gorbett was on guard.

When he was dressed he slipped out of the ward and down the stairs as quiet as you please. I was pretty certain he wouldn't be able to get away and took my time awakening the other fellows.

"S-h-h-h!" says I. "Don't make a sound."

"What's the rip?" says Scoop, rubb-

ing his eyes.

"Clarence is beating it down the stairs." says I.

He had a hand lamp and from the stairs we could see him at the front door. It was unlocked. Just as he was about to step through the open door a shotgun stared him in the face.

"Git back in thar, you young scamp," says Paddy Gorbett.

"Go-od-night!" says Clarence, falling back and wilting. "Who are you?"

"Never mind who I be. You git in thar whar you belong. If I catch you tryin' t' sneak out ag'in I'll pepper you with bird-shot."

At that moment we let loose and gave Clarence the the horselaugh.

"Was the little fellow going home to his mama?" says Scoop in jeering tones.

"Does he want him own 'ittle beddie?" says Peg.

Clarence was furious.

"Shut up!" he screamed, stomping up the stairs. He went into the ward, slamming the door after him.

This made us laugh all the harder. But a moment later our laughter was cut short.

Just after he disappeared into the ward we heard a knock on the kitchen door.

Who could it be at that time of night? Certainly not the guard. We could hear him on the front porch. Neither was it

likely to be Old Doc.

"Were going to have company," says Scoop, trying to act unconcerned. I guess, though, he was as badly frightened as the rest of us.

"Fine time of night to have callers," says Peg. "Its twelve o'clock."

"Maybe it's a ghost," says Red, his eyes popping out. "Twelve o'clock is always the time ghosts walk. Let's beat it fellows."

"Ghosts don't RAP," says Peg. "A ghost walks RIGHT THROUGH a door."

After talking about ghosts we were all feeling kind of shaky when we cautiously opened the kitchen door.

"Well I'll be jiggered!" says Scoop when he saw what was on the back porch, directly in front of the kitchen door. It was the twin babies we had seen in Simmons cave. They were tucked into a wicker basket, both sound asleep. When we dragged the basket into the kitchen we found a note tied to the handle. Scoop's hands sort of trembled as he untied the note and spread it out. I guess he was thinking of the smallpox patient in room number six, and about the ten thousand dollars. Then he read:

Please help an unfortunate mother,
and accept these babies into your
home. I will call for them in a few

days and pay you well for any trouble they may cause you. Please do not tell your neighbors about the babies or this note and you will be doubly rewarded.

CHAPTER VIII

For A moment we couldn't think of very much to say. We just stood there like a lot of ninnies and looked down on the sleeping babies. After what we had overheard at the cave and what Scoop had pumped out of the man in number six, it was plain that there was some mystery connected with the twins. The man in number six seemed to be anxious to get possession of them, and it did seem queer to have them drop into our hands in this way.

Scoop scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I'd be willing to bet dollars to doughnuts," says he "that whoever left the twins here dosen't know that this is a pest house and full of smallpox germs. No mother who really cared for her babies would leave 'em at a place like this."

"I guess we know who left them here all right," says Peg. "It was the man and woman we saw in the cave. Don't you recall fellows?---the man said something

about dropping the twins somewhere and beating it? Well, that's what they've done, I'll say."

"You're right," says Scoop. "But as I was saying, I'll bet when they left the twins here they didn't know about it being a pest house. They probably picked out this place because it stands by itself in a field, away from other houses. It's plain they don't want everybody in town to know about the twins being here. They thought if they picked out a place like this the neighbors wouldn't be so likely to find out about the matter."

"But how about the man in number six?" says I. "It looks as though they WANTED him to know."

"That's something I can't figure out." says Scoop, looking puzzled. "Until now I figured they were trying to keep the babies out of his reach; and if that is so it's hard to account for them leaving the twins here." says Peg.

"That could be," says Scoop. "Anyway that's how I'm going to look at it." After a minute or two he gave a low whistle and snapped his fingers excitedly. "Say, fellows, we're in luck," says he his eyes sparkling.

"How so?" says Peg.

"We're lucky to get hold of the twins in this way--considering the big pile of money at stake."

"You mean the ten thousand dollars?" says Peg.

"You bet."

Peg laughed grimly and says: "I'm thinking we'll be anything but lucky if Mrs. Maloney's knee isn't well to-morrow morning."

"What's her knee got to do with this?" says Scoop, scowling at Peg.

"Lots," says Peg. "If we're going to take care of these babies along with doing the cooking and washing dishes and everything, I guess we'll be out of luck. It ain't no easy matter taking care of babies. They can kick up an awful rum-pus. Besides, what do we know about it?"

"All babies are alike when it comes to yelling," says Peg.

"There is some mystery about THESE babies," went on Scoop. "Take the man in number six, for instance. It's a cinch HE wants 'em. It means a lot of money to him, too---he as much as said so. I don't know what the mystery is, fellows, but we can find out."

"How?" says Red eagerly.

"We'll sort of keep the twins out of sight and not let the man in number six know they're here. Then we'll pump him. That'll be easy. Look how I pumped him and found out where he's from. We'll find out what he knows about the twins

and why he wants 'em. If there's money in it for HIM to get possession of the twins there ought to be money in it for US."

"But it's going to be a job taking care of 'em," says Peg.

"I guess we'll live through it," says Scoop. "I'm willing to work good and hard for ten thousand dollars."

"You and me both," says I.

Peg grinned at us.

"All right, seeing as how you fellows like the job so well we'll let you take care of 'em. Won't we Red?"

"You bet," says Red with a laugh. "If there's any dishwashing to do, Peg and I'll do that, and you two can tend to the babies and keep 'em from having the croup."

"How about Mrs. Maloney?" says I.

"Shall we tell her in case she's still in bed to-morrow?"

"Not if we can help it," says Scoop.

"I figure the fewer people there are who know about the twins being here the better chance we have of getting the money."

"But she'll hear them if they start squalling."

"And so will the man in number six," says Red.

"We'll keep their doors closed," says Scoop. "And every time the twins set up a racket we'll thump on the piano. We

probably won't be able to drown them out, because, as Peg says, babies can make a deuce of a noise when they get tuned up. But we can make enough racket on the piano so thst their cries can be partly drowned out."

"That'll be fun," says Red. "I know how to play Yankee Doodle on the piano with one hand."

"Take it from me you'll need to use both hands," says Peg with a grin.

"And your feet, too," says I.

The twins kept on sleeping and we sat around and talked until after one o'clock, planning how we would spend the ten thousand dollars, only we didn't have a very clear idea of where we were going to get it. Scoop said we were lucky to escape going to school and have such a wonderful chance to make money at the same time. We agreed to that. The more we talked the more enthusiastic we became. Red said first crack out of the box he was going to buy a motorcycle with a side car, and he promised to let me run it. It was a cinch we were going to be able to buy a lot of things. Ten thousand dollars is a heap of money.

But, like Peg, I didn't overlook the fact that it was going to be a job to take care of the twins and keep Mrs. Maloney and the man in number six from finding out that they were in the pest

house. Just how we would make out seemed a bit uncertain, I thought.

"How are we going to feed 'em?" says I, after a while.

"Here's what they eat out of," says Scoop, fishing a couple of rubber-nippled bottles out of the basket. "All we've got to do is fill the bottles with milk and they'll do the rest."

Peg yawned. "Gee, I'm sleepy! It's 'most morning, fellows. Let's go to bed."

"And take the twins with us?" says I, turning to Scoop.

"We ought to keep 'em downstairs," says he. "Then the man in number six and Mrs. Maloney won't be so likely to hear 'em if they start squalling. One of us can stay with 'em. Suppose we draw cuts and see who gets the short straw."

Red got it. We helped him bring the baskets into the parlor and went upstairs to bed. But we didn't sleep very long. About an hour later he awakened us playing Yankee Doodle on the piano.

Gee, you could have heard him seven blocks! And above the din of the piano we could distinguish the wailing voices of the twins. Plainly something was the matter with them. We beat it for the stairs.

I was the last one into the hall. When I passed the door of number six the man yelled to me to stop. "Who salvaged the

Chinese orchestra?" says he with a growl, regarding me through narrowed eyes.

"It ain't an orchestra; it's just Red," says I. He looked at me so angry and disgusted I wanted to laugh. But I didn't. It did sound of queer to have Red banging away on the piano in the middle of the night.

"Well, he doesn't need to go practicing his music lesson when people want to sleep, does he?" says the man hotly.

"I'll go down and find out," says I, anxious to get away.

"Humph! Bean him with the settee and dump the blamed pianny into the alley. I want to sleep. There he goes again. Blast it! Does he play the thing with both feet, or just an ordinary axe?"

"With one hand," says I.

"What is it?---rural jazz?"

"It's Yankee Doodle."

"If that's Yankee Doodle I'm the Old Oaken Bucket," says he with a snarl, turning his face to the wall and stuffing his fingers into his ears.

Red was pounding on the piano for dear life. I knew what that ment: the fellows wanted me to hurry down. I beat it for the stairs, hoping that the twins hadn't swallowed a button or something. There they were sitting up in the basket, their faces streaked with tears, yelling to beat the cars. They seemed

to be all mouth. Scoop was teetering the basket; but the more he teetered the harder they yelled. And out in front Paddy Gorbett was kicking on the door, ordering us to go back to bed. It was some racket, all right!

"Get the milk, Jerry," yells Scoop, shoving the bottles to me with his foot.

"And for the love of Mike, hurry," cries Red over his shoulder, pounding away on the piano. Peg was helping him.

I found two quart bottles of milk in the ice box and quickly filled the rubber-nippled bottles. I figured the twins would be tickled over the nice cold milk. NO SIR! the twins did not take to that cold milk a-tall. After a taste they pushed the bottles away. Then, oh boy, how they did yell!

Scoop stared at them, running his fingers through his hair in a wild sort of way.

"What in the Sam Hill is the matter now?" he cried.

"Don't ask me," says I. "I ain't no mother."

"Something's wrong---that's a cinch."

"Maybe they want to be carried," says I.

"Let's try it," says he lifting one of them out of the basket. I took the other one and we skidded around the room, jiggling them up and down. But it didn't

do no good. They just kept on yelling as though they didn't know how to stop. At length we put them back in the basket and I dashed upstairs to consult Mrs. Maloney. I figured she ought to know what to do. It was a cinch we didn't.

"What's the meaning of all the rumpus downstairs?" says she angrily, as I tumbled pellmell into her room.

"You mean the music?" says I.

She threw up her hands.

"Music! Heavens preserve me! Sure I thought it was a Eye-talian shiv-a-ree."

"It's Red playing on the piano," says I.

"I'd believe you, Jerry, if you'd tell me he was jumping on it. Mither o' Moses! What do you mean creatin' such a disturbance in the middle of the night? Sure I'd settle your hides for you in a jiffy, you young scoundrels, if it wasn't for my lame knee. The doctor'll hear about this."

"Say, Mrs. Maloney," says I cutting in when she paused for breath. "Do you know anything about taking care of babies?"

"Heavens!" says she staring at me.

"Is the poor boy loosing his mind?"

"Do you know how to make them drink milk out of a bottle, Mrs. Maloney?"

"Jerry," says she in a startled sort of way, "be a good boy b'y and go back to bed." I began to feel desperate.

"Please tell me, Mrs. Maloney," says I coaxingly.

"This is awful!" says Mrs. Maloney, rolling her eyes.

"Please!" says I.

"Jerry, if I tell you, will you promise to go back to your bed?"

"Yes," says I quickly.

"Well first you rinse out the bottle and nipple with warm water. Then, you warm the milk just a trifle and add a little water so it won't be too rich. Then---"

"And is it already then?" says I cutting in.

"Sure it is."

"Thanks, Mrs Maloney," says I, dashing out of the room and down the stairs. When I looked back the old lady's lips were trembling, as though she were saying a prayer.

I fixed up the milk bottles the way she said. In a few minutes the twins were as happy as you please.

"Well, thank goodness the worst is over," says Scoop, heaving a sigh.

"Gee-miny! I hope we don't have to do this very often," says Red with a groan.

"I'm all in."

"They'll probably go back to sleep after they empty their bottles," says Scoop.

CHAPTER IX

The next morning we got breakfast. Mrs. Maloney's knee was worse. She couldn't move from her bed. With the twins to care for and breakfast to get and dishes to wash we were kept on the jump. Red wanted to make Clarence get up and help, but we decided not to do that. We didn't want him to find out about the twins.

Clarence was sore at everybody and everything--at Paddy Gorbett for heading him off the night before, and at us fellows for giving him a bath. We knew he would have a long chapter of grief to spill to Old Doc. That didn't worry us though.

Scoop toasted some bread for the man in number six and i carried it up to him on a tray, together with a cup of coffee.

"What's that he snaps?" he snaps, pointing to the stuff on the tray.

I could see he was in an ugly mood.

"Breakfast," says I shortly.

"What do you think I am?---a canary?"

"Well, if you don't like it you can lump it," says I, flaring up. Scoop and I had worked hard getting breakfast and I figured he ought to be greatful instead of kicking because he wasn't getting everything swell like he would in a city hotel.

"Ain't you got no ham and eggs?"

"Not for sick people."

"I ain't sick."

"Old Doc seems to think you are," says I with firmness.

"He's crazy."

"You tell him," says I.

"Look here, kid; don't I get nothing to eat?"

"There's ypur breakfast," says I, pointing to the tray. I stood my ground and pretty soon he picked up a piece of toast and looked it over.

"What's this?" says he.

"Toast," I replied.

"Is that a fact? Ain't it kind of damaged?"

I didn't tell him that Scoop had dropped it into the fire by accident. It wasn't necessary for him to know everything.

"I'll take it back if you don't want it," says I indifferently.

"No I'll eat it," says he sarcastically, "If you take it back and throw it out some poor dog might get hold of it and break off his teeth. I like dogs. I wouldn't want one to suffer on my account. Who's doing the cooking?---Cleopatra?"

"Scoop and I," was my reply. I wonderer who Cleopatra was. It wasn't anyone in Tutter, I was sure of that.

"Who's Scoop?" says the man.

"The cook," says I.

"Tell him what he ought to go."

"What," says I.

"He ought to cook one more breakfast like this and lay down and die," says the man with a growl.

After the breakfast dishes were washed, we got together in the parlor to talk matters over and sort of divide the work. New jobs were springing up every minute. I never realized before how many things there are to do about a house.

Scoop appointed Red to take care of the twins, because he knew how to play Yankee Doodle on the piano. Peg was to help take care of them when he wasn't washing dishes. My job was to give medicine to Clarence and the man in number six and help Scoop with the cooking. Of course there were other jobs, like making up beds and dusting and sweeping, but we figured there wouldn't be much of that to do for a few days at least. By

that time Mrs. Maloney's knee would be well and all we would have to do would be to loaf around and take it easy. It was a pleasant thing to look forward to.

"Well, there's one good thing about it, we don't have to go to school," says Scoop.

"You murmured something there old kid," says Peg.

"I'll say," says Red.

I looked across at the old grandfathers clock in the hall.

"Pretty soon we'll hear the first school bell," says I.

Scoop grinned happily.

"We should worry about that old school bell," says he. "Let it ring for all we care. WE don't have to go to school. Wish we were close enough to the road to rubber at the other kids as they go by with their books. Bet they'll be sore when they find out about us having it soft and them going to school and grinding away."

"Ain't that a fact," says Peg.

"We kept on talking and after a bit Scoop glanced at the clock. There was a puzzled look on his face.

"The clock must be fast," says he. "It's nine nine o'clock and the bell hasn't rung yet."

"We'll hear it pretty soon," says Peg confidently.

But we didn't. The big hand moved from nine to nine-thirty, and still no bell.

"Maybe they forgot to ring it," says Scoop.

Just before the clock struck ten Old Doc rattled up the lane in his flivver. Immediately we parked the twins back of the old piano so he wouldn't see them. Red squatted on the stool, prepared to pound out Yankee Doodle if they began to squall. When everything was ready Scoop opened the door.

I'll never forget how he looked when he saw who it was that Old Doc was helping up the steps. He didn't get white, like a fellow does who thinks he sees a ghost or something spooky in the dark. He was more green-like than white. His lower jaw sagged, and he braced himself against the door to keep from keeling over.

A second later we saw what had taken the pep out of him. Old Doc came into the pest house with Miss Gardner, our teacher, hanging to his arm. With her feet sort of dragging as she walked, she seemed skinnier than ever. There was a grey pinched expression about the corners of her mouth, and she appeared to be dizzy. When she looked at us through her big nose-glasses she didn't seem to see us.

Scoop was breathing hard, a wild look in his eyes. He touched Old Doc on the arm.

"Who--who's teaching the eighth grade?" says he, his voice sounding sort of hollow.

"No one," says Old Doc. "School's closed tighter 'n a drum."

"You say there AIN'T NO SCHOOL?" says Scoop, moistening his lips with his tongue.

"That's the situation," says Old Doc. He looked at Scoop sharply. "You got a funny color. Stomach out of order?"

"I--I just don't feel very well," says Scoop with a groan. Then he turned to Peg and I with a sort of whipped-dog look.

I knew how he felt. He was sick all over. So was I and So was Peg. Were thinking how awful it was to be shut up in the pest house with dishes to wash and meals to cook and babies to tend while all the other kids in town were playing baseball and having a good time. We planned on having the fun. Now they were having it and we were working. Certainly, we were out of luck.

Upstairs Mrs. Maloney was yelling to us to bring her a glass of water and some linament for her lame knee. It was medicine time for Clarence and the man in number six. In another hour it would be time to start dinner. Then came dish-

washing. After that Clarence's bath. Then more cooking and more dish-washing and---

"Look!" says Scoop miserably, pointing out through the open window. Scooting across Colonel Griffin's pasture were Bub Johnson and two other fellows. They had fish-poles and bait cans. They were whistling and shouting and having a good time. Then the twins let out a yell and Red started on Yankee Doodle.

"This is awful," says Scoop, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"Ain't it a fact," says Peg with a groan.

We didn't have much pep after that. But we decided it wasn't to our credit to lose our grit, so we buckled up our courage and turned a hand to getting Miss Gardner upstairs and into bed. We put her in number seven.

When she was made up comfortable and dosed with coffee-colored medicine, Old Doc lined us up for inspection. By this time our blotches were disappearing. As there were no sores Old Doc seemed to be puzzled.

As we expected, Clarence spilled a long tale of grief about the toad and the hot bath. But Old Doc didn't pay much attention to him. He seemed more concerned over the condition of Mrs. Maloney's knee. It was getting worse. He said it was

dcubtful if he could engage another woman to come to the pest house and take charge, but he'd try.

"If I can't, you boys 'll have to turn a hand and keep things goin'." says he.

"It ain't no fun," says Scoop.

"You ain't here for fun," says Old Doc sharply. "You're here to get well and help these other people get well."

"I wish I was out of here," says Scoop.

Just as he was leaving, Old Doc turned to us and said, sort of mysteriously:

"Watch that man in number six."

"What for?" says Scoop forgetting about being down in the mouth. He was interested right away.

"He's awful sassy," says Old Doc.

"Threatens to skin out if I don't discharge him. Like as not he'll try and sneak away when he thinks no one is watching."

Scoop thought this was a pretty good chance to find out if Old Doc knew anything about the smallpox patient. It was a cinch we had a lot of things to learn before we could get the ten thousand dollars, and we weren't letting any chances pass to pick up information where we could. I guess the ten thousand dollars was the only cheerful thought we had left.

"You don't happen to know what the man in number six is doing in Tutter, do you,

Doc?" says Scoop.

"What you got on your mind," says Old Doc, scowling at us.

"Just curious," says Scoop.

"humph!" Curiosity's what killed the cat," says Old Doc with a grunt, swinging on his peg-leg and stomping out through the front door.

Scoop followed him on to the porch.

"Say Doc."

"Well?"

"You don't reckon He's crazy, do you?" Old Doc looked at Scoop sharply.

"What makes you ask that?" says he.

"I was just thinking," says Scoop.

"He must be crazy to be CARRYING AROUND SUCH FUNNY THINGS IN A SUITCASE!"

"Funny things?"

"Yes. The suitcase is chockful of baby clothes."

"What suitcase?"

"The one in his room," says Scoop.

"Been snoopin'; have you?"

"I just happened to notice it," says Scoop. "Thought it was queer a preacher would be carrying a suitcase full of baby clothes around with him."

"Preacher?"

"He says he's a preacher," says Scoop.

"Preacher nothing," snorts Old Doc.

"Well, he IS a preacher," says Scoop, giving Peg and me a wink. It tickled us to see how he was pumping Old Doc.

"Nothing of the sort," sputters Old Doc.

"He ain't a preacher no more 'n I be."

"Sure he is," says Scoop aggravatingly.

"Nonsense!" says Old Doc. "He's a detective."

"What?" says Peg with a gasp, falling back a pace and clutching my arm. Scoop motioned for him to keep still. He turned to Old Doc.

"How do you KNOW he's a detective?" says he.

"I saw the handcuffs," says Old Doc. He has them in his trav'lin' bag. He's a detective all right. I tried to find out where he's from but he kep' a tight mouth on that."

"He's from Chicago," says Scoop.

"That's where he sent the telegram," says Old Doc.

"What telegram?" says Scoop quickly. Old Doc chuckled.

"Your so good at findin' out things, just you find out about the telegram," says he, climbing into his flivver.

CHAPTER X

When Old Doc's flivver was out of sight Scoop told us how he had slipped into room number six that morning when the man was asleep to investigate matters and as a result had found out about the baby clothes in the suitcase.

"And did you know about the handcuffs?" says Peg.

"No," says Scoop. "The traveling bag Old Doc mentioned was locked. But I felt pretty sure the fellow was a detective, because I saw his badge. His name is William Briggs." "Do you suppose he came to Tutter to arrest someone?" says Peg.

"Ain't much doubt about that," says Scoop.

"Who?" says Peg.

"Well, there's the man and woman we saw in the cave," says Scoop.

"I'll bet you're right," says Peg.

"Of course I'm right. It wasn't hard to figure that out. Don't you remember

what they said about a detective being hot on their trail, likely any minute to arrest 'em? If you'll think sharp, too, you'll recall they said something about the detective getting a suitcase away from them. That explains the suitcase upstairs. When the detective was taken sick at the hotel and brought here the suitcase; being in his possession, was brought along."

Then we thought of the twins who were sucking their sticky thumbs behind the piano. If the man and woman were crooks, as would seem to be the case, what were they doing with the twins? Did the babies really belong to the woman as the note indicated? I was beginning to have my doubts.

"It's pretty deep," says Scoop, when we talked it over. "But we'll stick to the the trail and find out what it all means. We'll show Mr. Detective Briggs that we can do detective work too."

"Anyway, we've got the upper hand of him," says Peg. "We've got the twins."

Scoop was thoughtful.

"I'd give my air-gun to know for certain what Old Doc ment," says he slowly.

"You mean about the telegram," says I.

"Yes. If the detective sent a telegram to chicago, I'll bet it was something to do with the twins. I'd like to know what was in that telegram, and

to whom it was sent."

"I'll bet we can pump it out of Old Doc," says Peg.

"We'll try," Says Scoop. "And we'll pump the detective too."

"Think you can get him to talk?"

"Leave him to me," says Scoop confidently. "Then, to-night, we'll draw cuts to see who goes to the cave."

"What's that?" says Peg and I in the same breath, looking at Scoop sharply.

"I've got an idea the man and woman are still hiding in the cave," says Scoop. "Two of us will watch our chance tonight and sneak out there and find out."

"And have Paddy Gorbett fill us full of full of bird shot," says Peg. "I guess not me!"

"Paddy gorbett won't damage us none if we're slick about it," says Scoop. "We can manage to get away from here without him knowing it. We'll make a noise to attract him to the front of the house. Then two of us can sneak out the back way and go to the cave, like I said. Shucks! Nothing so risky about that."

"It looks Risky to me," says Peg.

"If we're going to get a lot of money we can afford to take a few chances," says Scoop.

"You think we'll get the money?"

"Why not? The detective as much as told us it was worth ten thousand dollars

to him to get his hands on the twins. We have 'em where he ain't likely to get 'em. all we've got to do is find out what HE knows and the rest 'll be easy."

That noon Miss. Gardner almost choked to death on a piece of egg shell. She insisted on sitting up in bed, so we let her. We didn't argue the matter, because we figured if she got worse and died no one would be to blame but herself.

"You boys seem to be getting along nicely," says she in her put-on way---just like she was getting up a program and wanted us to speak a piece.

"Oh we expect to recover, all right," says scoop easily.

"I suppose you miss your books?"

"Oh, sure," says Scoop, giving us the wink. It was the truth: We missed them, but it was a happy miss.

"It's too bad to have your school work disrupted in this way," says she.

"Ain't it a fact," says Scoop, twisting up his face to keep from laughing right out. A lot we cared how much our school work was "disrupted", as she called it.

"Maybe I can help you," says she beginning to look businesslike.

"What's that?" says Scoop quickly.

"An idea just occured to me," says she. "Let me think it over. Later on I'll tell you all about it."

When we were in the hall Scoop turned

to me with an anxious look.

"I'm suspicious of her ideas," says he. "When she gets an idea one of us usually gets flogged."

"She's sick and can't flog us," says I.

"Just the same I feel uneasy. Wish I knew what her idea is."

We were soon to find out. That afternoon Old Doc brought out from town a whole armful of books---copy books and spelling books and arithmetics and geographies and everything.

We were pretty sick when we saw all those books; but we were a whole lot sicker when Old Doc lined us up in Miss. Gardner's room. She was sitting up in bed, with a pillow at her back, just as bossy looking as ever.

"Now, boys, take your seats," says she, pointing to where four chairs were lined up close to her bed.

"What's the idea?" says Scoop , Wild-eyed.

"I'm going to help you boys with your lessons, so you don't get behind in your classes," says she. "First, we'll take up geography. Turn to page sixty-seven and give me the products of Mexico."

I can't describe our feelings at that moment. You'll just have to use your imagination.

CHAPTER XI

We put in a miserable afternoon. I'll never forget it as long as I live. Afterwards, when I told mother about it she laughed. So did dad. They seemed to think it was funny. It wasn't a laughing matter to us fellows, though. I'll say not!

Miss. Gardner kept us cooped up in her room until after four o'clock. We had to sit there like ninnies and recite our lessons; and all the while we were adding and subtracting and telling about boundary lines of oceans and things we were thinking about the other kids who were running all over town having a good time.

The thing that unnerved us the most was the possibility of the twins letting out a yell. They were sleeping on some sofa pillows back of the piano. I don't know what we would have done had they awakened while we were in Miss. Gardner's

room. I guess, though, it would have been up to one of us to throw a fit, the better to give Red a chance to beat it out of the room to take care of them.

When the clock struck four-thirty she told us we could put our books aside for the day. Then we beat it down the stairs. Gee, we were sore! Peg said we ought to think up some scheme for getting rid of the books, but we didn't have a chance to do much thinking. It was time to start supper and medicine time for Clarence and the detective. We got buisy.

Scoop was keen for finding out all he could from the detective, so he showed Peg how to stir the potatoes to keep them from burning and he and I skinned upstairs.

"I've got a scheme for pumping the fellow, Jerry," says he.

"Good!" says I.

"We'll pretend we've been talking with the man and woman," says he.

"But we haven't," says I. "Won't we be telling a lie?"

Scoop scratched his head thoughtfully. Then he brightened.

"I guess It's all right to stretch the truth when you're doing detective work," says he. "A detective doesn't hesitate over a little thing like that. Why, every time he puts on a disguise he pre-

tends something that isn't true. We're detectives now. So we've got a right to pretend. Of course I won't pretend more than is necessary."

"All right," says I, following into number six. I could see he had the right idea. If we could bring a criminal to justice it would be all right for us to make up almost any kind of a story. In this case we had two criminals to consider: the man and the woman.

"What do you want?" says the detective sourly, the minute we stepped into his room.

"Maybe we've got some information that 'll interest you," says Scoop, acting sort of mysterious.

"What kind of information?" says he, looking at us sharply.

"About the man and woman you mentioned to us yesterday," says Scoop.

"What man and woman?"

"The ones we saw in Simmons cave."

"What about 'em."

"They were pretty much interested in you, I guess."

"How do you get that idea?"

"Why, from the way they acted when they called here with the twins last night."

The detective gave a violent start.

"Have they been here?" says he excitedly.

"Last night," says Scoop, which was the

truth.

"Why didn't you tell me about it before this?" says the detective.

"I reckon they weren't anxious to have you know about it," says Scoop.

"They knew I was here?"

"They must have been pretty certain about that, dont you think? Otherwise what would have been their object in calling here?"

The detective regarded Scoop narrowly.

"Did you tell them who I am?" says he.

"I know who you are, all right," says Scoop. "Instead of being a preacher **like** you said, you're a detective; and your name is Mr. Briggs."

"And they had the twins with 'em?"

"Yes," says Scoop. "They left the twins with us for a spell, and we fed 'em some milk. I reckon the man and woman are ready to split the money with you fifty-fifty if you say the word."

"The nerve of 'em!" says the detective with a gasp.

"You can let them know to-night," says Scoop.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if you want to split the money fifty-fifty, put a lamp in your window to-night between eleven and twelve o'clock. That'll be the signal that you're willing."

"Yes, go on," says the detective,

leaning forward eagerly.

"Then you can give their share fo the money to one of us fellows. We'll go to Colonel Griffin's pasture and leave the money near the big oak tree. Then you'll likely get immediate possession of the twins."

At this point the man laughed nervously.

"I guess they'll have a nice long wait if they expect me to send any money out to 'em." says he.

"You probably know where to get it," says Scoop.

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't."

"If you haven't got it you can telegraph for it."

"Telegraph where?"

"Maybe the same place you telegraphed before."

"Did they know about the telegram I sent the morning I was through here?" says the detective.

Scoop's eyes were dancing.

"They know a lot of things," says he.

"You write down what you want to go in the telegram and we'll see it gets down to the telegraph office."

A suspicious look flashed across the detective's face. I knew right away that Scoop had missed connections.

"Go chase yourself," says the man with a scowl. "They must nutty, or they imagine

I am. Split fifty-fifty? Not so you can notice it, I won't. I'll be out of here before very many hours. Then I'll show 'em I know how to get what I go after. They've given me the slip so far, but they won't be able to do it much longer. I've got 'em scared, or they wouldn't come whining around here wanting me to split with 'em. The crooks! Split nothin'! I've put two weeks of my own time on this job and there ain't going to be no splitting. Get that?"

Scoop was so excited over the way he had pumped the detective then we were back in the kitchen he hopped around, snapping his fingers.

"We're getting warmer all the time, fellows," says he, his eyes sparkling. Peg stood stirring the potatoes. Red was balanced on the edge of a chair with a baby on each knee. He was having a lot of fun jiggling them up and down.

"Do you know what I think?" says I thoughtfully.

"What?" says Scoop.

"I think the detective is a bigger crook than either the man or the woman. He looks it and acts it. Besides, he told us right out he's working this job, as he calls it, on his own time. I'll bet he's scheming to get a reward or ransom or something."

"You may be right," says Scoop. "And

if you ARE right, I'd be willing to gamble the ransom has something to do with the twins."

"Maybe they don't belong to the man and woman at all." says Peg. "Maybe they've been kidnapped and the man and woman are the kidnappers. That would explain a lot of things that aren't very clear to us right now, fellows."

"Yes, and it would make one thing a whole lot harder to explain," says Scoop. "If the man and woman are kidnappers, and the detective is trailing 'em to get possession of the twins, why is he doing it on his own time? That's just another way of saying he's trailing them on the sly; and, as Jerry says, it sort of points out that he's up to some crooked work. And if the man and woman really did kidnap the twins, and have been trying to keep 'em out of the detective's reach, why did they leave 'em here at the pest house, under his very nose, as at were?"

"Maybe they didn't know about the detective being here," says Peg.

"That's probably it," says Scoop. "It looks to me as though the woman was scared the detective would get the twins away from her; and wanting to prevent that, she got 'em out of his reach, so she thought, by dropping 'em on our doorstep."

"And you think she's hiding in the cave?"

"I'm thinking that could be the case. In the note she mentioned she'd be back to claim the twins. That would indicate she's in the neighborhood. Where else would she be more likely to conceal herself than in the cave? Anyway, we'll go out there tonight and find out. And when Old Doc shows up we'll pump him about the telegram that the detective sent the morning he was brought here. That was last saturday. As I see it, fellows, the telegram is a mighty important clue."

We were all excited over the trip to the cave. Scoop and I drew the two short straws. It was arranged that Red was to take care of the twins and Peg promised to keep an eye on the detective.

When It began to get dark the man got up. To play safe we locked his door on the hall side. He wasn't very sick, and it was plain that he could easily take care of himself if he had a chance to slip away from the pest house.

"It's a cinch that he's getting ready to beat it," says Scoop.

"He may think he is, but he won't get a chance," says Peg, looking grim. "Just leave him to me, fellows. If he tries to pass by me he'll get a wallop over the bean that he won't forget for a day or two. I'll stop him!"

"More than likely he thinks the man and

woman will be hanging around in Colonel Griffin's pasture near the big oak tree watching for him to give the signal. He swallowed that bunk, all right. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised that between eleven and twelve o'clock we'll find a light in his window. We'll watch and see.

It was pretty late when Scoop and I got ready to go to the cave. Paddy Gorbett was out in front. To keep him there Peg went out on the porch and talked with him while Red hammered on the piano. We knew Paddy would kick on the noise. While he was threatening to come in and clean up on Red, Scoop and I could easily make our get-away through the kitchen door.

"Now's our chance," says Scoop.

With hardly a sound we slipped out through the back door and scooted through the tall grass to the board fence that separates the pest house from the pasture. In a jiffy we were over the fence and beating it for the railroad track.

CHAPTER XII

Half way across the pasture we dropped on to the grass to get our wind.

"What time was it when we left, Jerry?" says Scoop.

"Pretty close to 'leven," says I.

"We'll wait here a few moments," says he, and watch the window of number six. Unless I'm mistaken we'll see something."

Sure enough, as we lay there a light appeared in the window of the detective's room.

Scoop took hold of my arm excitedly.

"It's the signal, Jerry," says he.

"If he thinks he's signaling to the man and woman it won't do him no good," says I.

"But he doesn't know that," says Scoop. He was thoughtful for a moment, then said slowly: "I wonder what his game is, anyway?"

"Maybe the light is a bait," says I.

"He probably figures to keep the man and

woman hanging around the oak tree while he makes his escape from the pest house and sneaks up on 'em."

"I'll bet that's it," says Scoop. "But he'll find it won't work. In the first place, even if he does get out of the pest house, he won't find the man and woman near the oak tree. In the second place, he doesn't stand a ghost of a show of getting out. If he tries it through the window, Paddy Gorbett'll fill him full of bird shot. His door is locked on the hall side, so he can't get out of his room without breaking down the door. By that time I guess Peg'll have beaned him with a club. He'll be right there in number six when we get back, I'll gamble on that."

We jumped the creek and hurried along toward Simmons cave. It was awfully spooky---dark and sort of still-like. When we left the railroad track and cut through the woods we could hear the winged things dip down and pass close to our heads. An old owl didn't want us in the woods and hooted resentfully. Bullfrogs croaked in a pond in the ravine. Once I stepped on something that wiggled. Scoop said it probably was a toad. I knew better. It was a snake.

When we rounded Name-Rock hill and came within sight of the cave we saw ahead of us the flicker of a camp fire. We crept

up without a sound. Sure enough, the man and woman were there. The woman sat close to the fire, her chin resting in her hands, her elbows on her knees. She looked tired and worn-out. The man, as on the previous occasion, was walking back and forth behind the fire, smoking his pipe.

"Down!" says Scoop, and we dropped to our stomachs just outside the entrance.

"What are we going to do?" says I in a whisper.

"We'll lay here for a few moments and listen," says he. "Maybe we'll find out something important."

The man and woman didn't seem to have much to say to each other. He kept walking back and forth, his shoes grinding on the sandy floor as he made the turns. After a bit the woman gave a deep sigh and says:

"What time is it now?"

The man leaned close to the fire and looked at his watch.

"Eleven-thirty," says he shortly.

"An hour and a half more," says the woman wearily. "It's been a long wait."

"I'll be glad when it's over with," says the man with a growl. "If I had known in the first place what was going to happen I never would have concented. With that blamed detective hot on our trail I almost feel like a crook. I

can't get away from the idea that he'll catch us yet."

"But he won't get the babies," says the woman quickly. "We've placed them where they'll be out of his reach."

They quit talking then. After a bit Scoop pinched my arm and we crawled back out of hearing.

"We've got to do something," says he.

"What'll we do?" says I. I was game for anything.

"Lets get busy and think."

I was still thinking as hard as I could, without getting any where, when he snapped his fingers excitedly.

"I've got a dandy scheme, Jerry,."

"Spill it," says I eagerly.

"We'll pretend were tramps and fake up a hard luck story. Guess it'll be all-right for us to pretend as long as we're detectives and trailing desperate criminals."

"But tramps are men," says I.

"I guess there are boy tramps. That's what we'll be."

"And then what?" says I.

"We'll sorta make it up as we go along," says he. "It won't be hard. Just leave it to me, Jerry."

Tramps are usually dirty and pretty greasy, and wanting to look like the real thing we beat it back to the railroad track. Here we got some packing from an axle box on a flat car and rubbed streaks

on our faces and hands. Then we started back to the cave.

When we were close to the cave Scoop began talking out loud, so the man and woman could hear us coming.

"We'll hide in the cave, Pete," says he. Pete is my "pirate" name.

"What cave, Red Eye?" says I. That is Scoops "pirate" name.

"There's a cave up here in the rocks," says he. "The constable'll never think to look for us in a cave."

"Right you are," says I.

"We were lucky to break out of jail so easy," says he. "It's a good thing I had my saw along to saw the iron bars." He stopped suddenly and took hold of my arm. "Good heavens, pete! There's someone in the cave. Maybe it's the constable. Drop to the ground before he fills our hides with bullets."

We dropped flat on our stomachs and lay perfectly still. Pretty soon, as we expected, the man came cautiously from the cave and crossed to where we were.

"Who are you?" says he suspiciously.

"Don't shoot, Mr. constable," says Scoop.

"I'm not a constable. Get up."

We got up.

"I'm awfully glad, mister, you're not a constable," says Scoop.

The man looked us over, then gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why you're nothing but kids!" says he.

"We're tramping," says Scoop.

"Where you from?"

"Don't send us back," says Scoop, acting scared. "If you do he'll likely beat us and club us."

"Who do you mean by that?" says the man.

"Maybe our step-father," says Scoop.

"He hates us, mister. When he isn't beating us with clubs he's starving us."

"Yes," says I with a groan, thinking that Scoop was making up a pretty slick yarn.

The man stared at us for a moment, then says:

"Did I hear you boys say something about being in jail?"

"Yes sir," says Scoop.

"What jail?"

"The one over there," says Scoop, pointing toward Tutter.

"What did they put you in jail for?"

"We'd rather not tell," says Scoop, edging away.

The man took hold of him by the arm.

"I think you're a pair of young crooks," says he sharply.

"We ain't," says Scoop.

"We're poor, honest boys," says Scoop.

"Honest boys don't get put in jail."

"He tried to get us to own up to some-

thing we didn't know anything about; then he put us in jail," says Scoop.

"The constable?"

"No, the detective from Chicago."

"WHAT?" says the man.

"I guess he's from Chicago." says Scoop. "He's a detective, and his name is Briggs."

The man gave a cry and whirled Scoop around so that the light from the fire fell on his face.

"What's that?" says he tensely.

Scoop repeated what he had said. the man seemed dazed.

"Just because he found a baby shoe in my pocket he thought we knew something about a pair of babies he's looking for," says Scoop.

"Good heavens!" says the man, breathing hard.

"He tried to make us tell where we got the baby shoe, but we didn't."

"Did---did you get it at a house that stands by itself in a pasture?" says the man.

"How'd you know?" says Scoop.

"What were you doing in that house?" says the man.

"We were hungry and forced our way in to get something to eat. When we saw the baby shoe we sort of picked it up--- I don't know why exactly. Pretty soon after that the Chicago detective he coll-

ared us. Then we got put in jail."

"You say he tried to make you tell where you picked up the baby shoe?" asks the man.

"Yes sir," says Scoop.

"But you didn't tell?"

"No sir," says Scoop.

The man gave a sigh of relief.

"What a narrow escape!" says he to himself. Then he took us into the cave and repeated Scoop's yarn to the woman.

"Maybe we ought to have told the detective where we got the baby shoe," says Scoop.

"Oh no!" cried the woman, looking wild.

"I'm beginning to think we made a mistake breaking out of jail," says Scoop thoughtfully. "A cloud of suspicion will always hover over us. We'll never have a chance to live it down. Maybe we ought to go back and ask the constable to put us back in jail and then tell the detective---"

"No you won't," says the man, cutting in.

"I think we ought to," says Scoop.

"Have another 'think' ," says the man.

"Come on, Pete," says Scoop, making as though he was about to scramble to his feet.

"All right, Red Eye," says I, getting up.

"The man stepped between us and the

entrance. His jaw was set squarely and a determined light flashed in his eyes.

"You don't leave this cave with no such intentions as that," says he grimly.

"But we feel we didn't do right," says Scoop. "We're going back and---"

"Sit down," says the man.

"What for," says Scoop.

"Sit down and I'll tell you."

He came and sat down near us with the woman besides him, her hands nervously clasping her knees. I felt sorry for her. She was terribly worried about something.

"We want you boys to help us," says the man after a moment.

"How," says Scoop.

"First, by promising not to go back to tell the detective where you got the shoe."

"Why not?" says Scoop.

"If you do you'll be the direct means of breaking a good woman's heart," says the man.

"Her heart?" says Scoop, pointing to the woman.

The man turned to his companion and says:

"Shall I tell them, Nina?"

"Yes," says the woman softly. "They seem like kind hearted boys. I'm sure they'll help us if they know."

Scoop nudged me excitedly. It was a cinch we were going to find out something important about the twins.

CHAPTER XIII

"We're helping a mother save her twin babies from falling into the hands of a mean father," says the man. "The mother and father have separated and expect to be divorced. Both want to have possession of the twins. The detective you mentioned a moment ago has been hired by the father to kidnap the babies. The woman here is my sister, a maid in the employ of the mother. My sister was prevailed upon to run away with the twins when it became apparent that the father was determined to gain possession of them. She was instructed by the mother to keep them out of sight til the divorce was granted. In turn my sister dragged me into the mess. A few nights ago we left the twins at the house where you picked up the baby shoe, being afraid that the detective would get them away from us. Only a few days ago he was so close that he got our suitcase. If you

had told him where you picked up the baby shoe he would have known immediately where the babies are."

"Now that you know, you won't tell, will you?" cries the woman, reaching out and touching Scoop on the arm.

"What'll we do, Pete?" says he.

"Just as you say, Red Eye," says I.

"Let's help 'em," says he.

"All right, : says I.

The woman gave a glad cry. Then the man continued with his story:

"In a few hours the chase will be over as far as my sister and I are concerned. We have telegraphed for the mother of the twins to come here. We expect her to-night on the one o'clock train from Chicago. We'll help get the twins out of town. Then we're through."

The man looked at his watch and jumped to his feet.

"We'll have to leave here right away," says he. "It's twelve-thirty."

He beat out the fire. Then we all filed out of the cave and down the hill to the railroad track. When we came to the depot we found everything dark and still. Tutter is such a small town we don't have a night operator like they do in the cities

A lot of things were cleared up by what the man had told us. It explained about the twins and why they had been

left at the pest house. But it didn't explain about the ten thousand dollars, unless it was that the detective was expecting the father of the twins to pay him that much money for gaining possession of them, which didn't seem probable.

Pretty soon a whistle sounded in the distance. When the train drew up, with a hissing and grinding, lighting up the depot platform, a woman stepped down from one of the coaches. She lifted a black heavy veil and glanced about her. Nina ran forward, and the two fell into each other's arms.

"Oh Nina! I'm so afraid you wouldn't be here to meet me."

The man stepped up to them.

"Let's go," he said crisply. "We've got some ticklish work ahead of us to-night; and you ought to get out of town before day-break. There's a train north in two hours."

"But where are my babies?" says the mother.

"We'll take you to them right away."

Then he told her how the twins had been left at the pest house---only he didn't call it that. He spoke of it as the house in the pasture. He didn't know it was a pest house.

"It was the only safe plan," says he. "The detective was hot on our trail and we were afraid that he would overtake us

any minute. If you have plenty of money to pay the people, you won't have any trouble getting the twins back.."

Scoop took the lead when we started for the pest house. As we picked our way along in the darkness I was wondering what would happen when we got there. We hadn't figured on bringing anyone back with us. It looked to me as though we were in somewhat of a fix. If the man following at our heels learned that we had an easy way of getting into the pest house he would become suspicious. Then anything could happen to us. And if we didn't slip into the pesthouse quietly Paddy Gorbett would get going with his shotgun.

"We've got to carry it through," says Scoop in a whisper, when I told him what was on my mind. "We'll just keep on making 'em think we're a couple of tramps. When we arrive at the pesthouse we'll offer to go on ahead and force an entrance and get the twins for 'em. I think we can think we can think up a scheme and get by with it and not arouse their suspicions."

"I bet you're right about that," says I, as we walked along.

We decided between us that the twins were to be turned over to the mother. that seemed the right thing to do. And then and there our dreaan of getting ten

thousand dollars and riding around in motor cycles with side-cars faded away. Somehow, though, we didn't mind that so terribly much, though it was a disappointment. We felt sorry for the mother. She seemed to be a nice lady, gentle and helpless, and we were glad to assist her in getting possession of her babies. Scoop and I were still whispering when we came to the lane leading from the road to the pest house. Half way down the lane we came within an ace of stumbling into a big touring car. The lights were out and we didn't see it until we were right on it.

"Cracky!" says Scoop, squinting into the darkness for a better look at the automobile.

"What's it doing here in the lane?" says I.

"That's what I'm wondering," says Scoop.

"Doesn't look like a Tutter auto," says I.

Before Scoop had a chance to reply one of the doors of the automobile clicked open and a big fat man stepped out. At least he looked awfully big and fat what we could make out of him in the darkness.

"Do you have a garage in this town?" says he in a deep, gruff voice.

"What seems to be the matter," says

Scoop. I could tell from his tone of voice that he was suspicious of the man. I was, too.

"Lights won't work. Loose battery connection somewhere. Beastly thing to have happen in the middle of the night."

"What are you doing in the lane?" says Scoop.

"Turned in here by mistake. I'm looking for a place called detention hospital. Can I get you to run up town and wake up a garage man?"

"Can't do it," says Scoop.

"I'll give you a dollar."

"I've got other business more important," says Scoop.

At this the man growled and climbed back into the automobile. Scoop passed around the car and headed up the lane for the pesthouse. I was about to trail after him when the man who had come with us from the cave took hold of me from behind and yanked me back.

"What the dickens----" says I. He slapped his hand over my mouth.

"For heavens sake, kid, keep quiet." says he in a hoarse whisper.

"Wha-at's the matter," I managed to mumble. He had me scared, I'm willing to admit that.

"Matter enough. That man in the car is the father of the twins. He's here

to get possession of them. We've got to beat him to it. Run ahead and overtake your pal and tell him.

CHAPTER XIV

Scoop had missed me. I met him coming back. He was pretty much excited when he learned that the man in the big automobile was the father of the twins. The man had told us that he turned into the lane by mistake. We realized now he had said that to quiet our suspicions.

There was no doubt in our minds that he was there to get possession of the twins. And for all we knew he had someone with him who was already in the pest house. That was an uncomfortable thought.

Still, he had told us outright that he was looking for the detention hospital---which was just a big sounding name for the pest house. Was it possible, after all, that he didn't know that the pest house was just ahead of him?

It was plain to us, however we reviewed the situation, that there was a need for prompt action. So quickly and quietly we stole past the automobile and joined

our companions. The mother of the twins was having hysterics. Nina had her hands full caring for her.

"Brace up," says the man sharply, touching Nina's mistress on the arm.

"Oh, I'll loose my darling babies," says the woman with a wail, wringing her hands. "He's here to get them away from me. Oh! Oh!"

"You'll loose 'em, all right, if you keep this up," says the man with a growl. He turned to Scoop. "Did you say you forced an entrance in this house a few nights ago?"

"Yes sir," says scoop.

"Can you do it again?"

"You bet."

"Then get set, because that's what I'm going to ask you to do. The father of the twins knows about them being here. Otherwise he wouldn't be here himself. He probably has the the detective with him. The fellow may already be in the house. He must have learned in some way that the twins are here and wired the father to come and get them."

Scoop and I knew that the man was on the wrong track in thinking that the detective was with the father of the twins. But we didn't say anything. It was plain to us now that the morning the detective was taken to the pest house he had telegraphed to the father, instructing him to come

to Tutter. In the telegram he must have mentioned that he was being taken to the pest house. That would explain what the fat man meant by saying that he was looking for a place called the detention hospital. He was really trying to get in touch with the detective. But did he know that the twins were in the pest house? And, if so, how had the detective found out about them?

We helped the two women over the board fence into the pasture. Then we prepared to cautiously approach the house from the kitchen side.

"You wait here for us," says Scoop.

"What are these boys going to do?" says the mother, turning to Nina's brother.

"There going to force an entrance to the building and get the twins," says the man.

"But if they fail?"

Scoop touched her on the arm.

"We won't fail, ma'am, " says he grimly.

We had some pebbles in our pockets. when we were close to the house we tossed two against the kitchen door. That was the signal for Red to open the door and let us in.

We threw two more pebbles. Still no response.

"I wonder what's the matter with Red?" says Scoop in an anxious whisper. "He

should have heard the pebbles."

"Maybe he's busy with the twins," says I.

"We wormed our way along on our stomach's through the tall grass until we were close to the house. For several minutes we lay there listening. Not a sound came to us from within. Scoop gripped my hand.

"Does anything about the pest house seem queer to you, Jerry?" says he.

"It's awfully quiet," says I.

"It's too quiet," says he.

"You think something's happened?" says I.

"It looks that way," says he. "Where's Paddy Gorbett?"

"Probably 'round in front," says I.

"Wouldn't we have heard him before this if he was out in front?" says he.

"You think he isn't there?"

"I'm going to find out," says he grimly.

We edged along in the grass until we came to the corner of the house. It was so dark we couldn't see very well. We figured, though, that if Paddy were there we would hear him moving around. There wasn't a sound. Scoop tossed a pebble. It struck the front door and rattled across the wooden porch floor. Then all was still again.

We were scared good and plenty. Something was wrong. Where was Paddy? Why were there no lights in the pest house? And why was everything about the place so

so still and creepy-like?

"We've got to go inside, Jerry," says Scoop.

"We'll get shot," says I uneasily.

"Well just take a chance," says Scoop. "Something's happened to Peg and Red. Otherwise we'd have heard from them before this."

We picked our way cautiously, not wanting to take any needless chances. It seemed an hour before we were on the front porch. When we tried the door it swung back noiselessly.

The hall and parlor were in pitchy darkness. Trembling, we stepped inside. I expected nothing else but to have something reach out and grab me. Then we came to a dead pause. Our hearts were beating like trip-hammers. A sound reached us that made our hair stand on end. It was a muffled groan.

"It's Peg!" says I with a gasp. "He's in trouble."

I could hear Scoop breathing hard. A moment later he struck a match and lit a lamp that stood on the hall table. As the light flared up we quickly glanced about us, ready to duck. Peg was flat on the floor beside the piano. He was tied hand and foot. A handkerchief drawn tight about his mouth, shut off his speech.

With a cry we dashed across the room and liberated him. He staggered to his

feet, acting dizzy. There was a big blue lump on his forehead.

"The twins!" he gasped, looking at us wildly.

"Where are they?" says Scoop.

"I---I don't know," says Peg faintly, rubbing his forehead.

Then, as best he could, he told us what had happened while we were away. It seemed we had overlooked a door leading out of room number six into room number five through a closet. In this way the detective had escaped.

"He came at me from behind," says Peg. "When he had me tied up he went downstairs. On finding the nursing bottles he was the wildest man you can imagine. He seemed to know right away we had been keeping the twins in the pest house. He dragged me down the stairs, threatening to kill me if I didn't tell him where they were. I couldn't tell him that; to save my life I couldn't."

"What do you mean?"

"Fellows, the only thing I know is that Red and the twins disappeared about the time the detective made his escape."

We searched the pest house finding Mrs. Maloney locked in her room. She was just about scared stiff. So were Miss. Gardner and Clarence. But of Red and the twins there was no trace whatever. They had disappeared as completely as though

the earth had yawned and engulfed them. Neither did we come across the detective.

"I know where HE is," says Peg. "He's hotfooting it along the pike somewhere between here and Chicago, with Paddy Gorbett on his trail with the shotgun."

"Lets hope Paddy catches him," says Scoop grimly.

What had become of Red and the twins? Peg insisted they came up missing at the time the detective escaped from room number six. But somehow Scoop and I couldn't get away from the feeling that one way or the other the detective was responsible for their disappearance. We were worried. From the way he had banged Peg over the head it was pretty plain to us that he was desperate. If he had nabbed onto Red and the twins, as seemed likely, certainly they were in grave danger.

On the other hand there was the fat man in the automobile ---the father of the twins. Wasn't it logical to assume that he had something to do with Red's disappearance and was now in possession of the twins? But, if so, why was he still hanging around out in front? And where was Red?

Peg asked about the grease streaks on our faces. As quickly as possible we told him about our adventure at the cave. His eyes got big and round as he listened.

"Gee-miny!" says he. "The father of the twins in the front yard and the mother and her gang in the back yard! It looks to me, fellows, as though there's going to be one gosh-awful rumpus around the old germ-joint before many minutes."

"You said a mouthful," says Scoop. "First thing we know the father and mother will come prancing in here, one through the front door and the other through the back door, ready to claw at each other. And like as not we'll get blamed because the twins aren't here. Fellows where can they be?"

"No use looking at me," says Peg doggedly. He felt pretty cheap to think that the detective had out-tricked him. He didn't like to hear about it. "I tell you, fellows," says he, "I don't know where the twins are. When the detective tore downstairs I was scared stiff, thinking that he would find them. I knew our plans would be shot to pieces if he did. But, as I say, all he found was the milk bottles and some baby clothes. With these in his hands he came boiling downstairs, threatening to put me out of business if I didn't tell him where the twins were. I couldn't tell him. I didn't know. Red's disappearance is just as much of a mystery to me as it is to you."

"And when you were in the upper hall watching the door of number six---before the detective escaped---you didn't happen to notice any unusual sounds from downstairs?"

"Not a thing."

"Think hard, Peg," says Scoop.

"Blame it ! I am thinking hard," says Peg, flaring up.

"You didn't hear the front door open, or Red talking to anyone?"

"No I didn't."

"And you haven't the least idea whether Red disappeared of his own accord or whether someone made him disappear?"

Peg slowly shook his head.

"Honest, fellows, I can't think of a thing. If I hadn't searched the pest house from top to bottom and made sure he wasn't here, I'd say he must be here, some place."

"But it's a cinch he isn't," says Scoop.

"I know it. But that's all I do know." says Peg with finality.

While we stood there trying to arrive at a plan of action we heard footsteps on the front porch. This gave us an awful scare. It turned out to be the fat man--the father of the twins. As he crossed the porch it creaked beneath his weight.

"Howdy," says he in a gruff, throaty

voice, coming in through the open door.

"Howdy yourself," says Scoop stiffly. We were pretty certain in our own minds that the man was more or less responsible for the disappearance of Red and the twins. We didn't feel very friendly toward him. At the same time we didn't let our feelings run away with us. We were anxious to find out all we could from him in regard to Red and the twins, and knew it wouldn't favor our plans to act sassy with him.

"You kids live here?" says he.

"Just now we do," says Scoop.

"Where are your folks?"

"Sleeping I suppose."

"Got a telephone?"

"It's over there on the wall," says Scoop, pointing.

"Care if I use it?"

"Help yourself," says Scoop.

The man crossed the room and took down the reciever. After waiting a minute or two without getting a response, he jiggled the reciever hook. Then he let out a growl.

"Who you trying to get?" says scoop.

"The garage. My car's on the blink."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Lights won't work."

The man apparently hadn't recognized Scoop as being the boy he talked to in the lane a few minutes previous. And

while he jiggled the receiver hook, his back turned to us, Scoop shot a puzzled glance at me. It surprised both of us, I guess, to learn there really was something the matter with his automobile. He had told us in the lane his lights were on the blink. But upon finding out who he was we sort of got the feeling that what he had told us was bunk. Now, it looked as though he had told us the truth. And maybe he wasn't accountable for the disappearance of Red and the twins, after all.

After a bit the man slammed the receiver back on the hook.

"Nice service," says he with a growl. He looked awfully sour.

"If you wait til morning you can get someone to come out here and fix your car," says Scoop.

"That's just what I don't want to do. I ought to be out of this blamed town before daybreak."

"Why?" says Scoop, regarding the man narrowly. Peg and I held our breath. We were hoping that the man would say something that would give us an idea as to what had happened to Red and the twins. But he didn't.

"You better wait here till morning," says Scoop after a moment. "We've got an extra bed upstairs, if you want to go up and lay down. You might just as

well. It'll be several hours before daylight. There isn't much use of you sitting up unless you've got to."

With a tired sigh the man dropped on to one of the parlor chairs, placing his elbows on his fat knees and resting his flabby chin in his hands. He seemed to be deciding something in his own mind. After a moment he looked up.

"Guess I'll go upstairs and lay down an hour or two if you don't mind," says he. "Been driving all night. I'm pretty tired. Maybe you better call your pa and tell him. He might kick about me being here, mussing up the spare bed."

"He won't mind a bit," says Scoop.

The man looked Scoop and me over sharply, evidently just noticing the grease that we had rubbed on our hands and faces.

"You youngsters sort of need an overhauling with a cake of soap and a scrubbing brush, don't you?" says he with a grunt. "If the spare bed you've been telling me about looks anything like you kids, I'd rather a danged sight go out in the alley and lay on the ash pile."

"The bed's nice and clean," says Scoop, heading for the stairs with the lamp in his hand. "Right this way, mister." There was only one lamp lit, so Peg and I went along, not wanting to be left downstairs in the dark.

Scoop showed the man into number six.

The room was mussed up some, but he seemed to be satisfied with the way things looked.

"If I don't wake up of my own accord by five o'clock, be sure and call me," says he, removing his coat and vest.

"You bet," says Scoop, lighting another lamp that stood on the dresser. As we turned to leave the room the man called us back.

"I want to ask you kids about this town," says he.

"What about it?" says Scoop.

"It's Tutter, isn't it?"

"Sure is," says Scoop.

"Wasn't certain. Dropped into the pesky place this midnight. These hick towns all look alike after nine o'clock in the evening."

"In town on business?" says Scoop.

"Huh!" says the man with a snort. "You don't think I picked out this jerk-water burg for entertainment, do you?"

"I just asked," says Scoop.

"You kids pretty well acquainted around here?"

"We've lived here all our lives," says Scoop.

"Know a place called the detention hospital?"

"Yes ," says Scoop.

"Is it nearby?"

"Pretty close," says Scoop.

Gee! I guess it was close. It couldn't very well be any closer.

"I'm going to ask you to point the place out to me when it gets daylight," says the man, smoothing the covers on the bed.

Scoop stepped forward and helped. When they had the covers fixed all right, Scoop said:

"I reckon you won't care to hang around the detention hospital if you haven't the smallpox or something."

"Oh, I don't care to go inside," says the man quickly. "You don't catch me hanging around places like that."

Good-night! I wondered what he would say if he knew he was IN the detention hospital, as he called it.

"What do you expect to do there?" says Scoop.

"There's a man confined in the place I want to get in touch with. I figure I can talk with him through an open window."

"Bet I know who you mean," says Scoop. "Is he the Chicago detective?"

The man gave a start.

"What do you know about the detective?" says he, regarding Scoop sharply.

"I know a few things about him," says Scoop.

"For instance, I happen to know he isn't at the pest house like you seem to think he is."

"Pest house?"

"That's just another name for the detention hospital," says Scoop.

"You say the detective isn't there?"

"Absolutely not," says Scoop.

The man laughed gruffly.

"You're some little kidder, I'll say."

"I ain't kidding," says Scoop. "I know what I'm talking about. The detective's name is Briggs. He was shut up in the pest house, all right, but he isn't there now. About two hours ago he made his escape.."

"The man stared at Scoop, his forehead wrinkled into a scowl.

"You aren't making this up?" says he.

"I'm telling the truth, all right," says Scoop.

"You're sure the detective escaped?"

"Yes sir," says Scoop.

"Do you know where he is now?"

"I wish I did," says Scoop. The man, of course, didn't know what he ment by that.

"But you don't?"

"No sir," says Scoop.

The man walked up and down the room, lost in thought, his hands behind his back. He looked awfully grim. After a moment he says: "Do you happen to know if the detective has a couple of babies in his possession?"

"I cant say," says Scoop.

"He must have them or know where they

are, or else he wouldn't have wired for me to come here," says the man to himself, sort of forgetting, I guess, that we stood listening.

"What's that?" says Scoop.

The man gave a start.

"Never mind what I said," says he.

After a minute or two Scoop says:

"Is there anything else you want of us?"

"That'll be all," says the man, "except that I want you to call me at five o'clock and point out the detention hospital that we've been talking about. Even if the detective has escaped, as you say, I want to make a few inquiries there. Guess there isn't any use for me to try and do anything until it gets daylight."

CHAPTER XV

When we were in the hall Scoop quietly turned the key in the door of room number six, locking the fatman in. Then he went into room number five and locked the closet door through which the detective had made his escape.

"Fellows, we've got a real job ahead of us," says he. "We've got to find the twins and turn 'em over to the mother. And to make certain that old fatty doesn't mess things up for us we'll keep him locked in his room."

We waited in the upper hall til the fat man began to snore. Then we beat it for the stairs, feeling pretty certain that he wouldn't bother us for a few hours, at least.

Scoop was in the lead carrying the lamp. When we reached the foot of the stairs who should bob up in front but the man we left in the pasture. He gave us an awful scare. The front door stood

open. Evidently he had tiptoed in without us hearing him.

"I was expecting you," says Scoop, setting the hand lamp on the hall table.

"Why have you delayed getting the twins into our hands?" says the man suspiciously. I could tell from the look on his face that he was likely to make trouble for us.

"We've been searching for 'em," says Scoop.

"Do you mean to say you've been here all this time and haven't been able to find them?"

"That's the case," says Scoop.

"But they should be here."

"They ain't."

The man looked in Peg's direction and scowled.

"Who's that boy?" says he, turning on Scoop.

"He lives here," says Scoop.

A grimness settled over the man's face. I began to feel shaky. It was plain he was thoroughly of the opinion that we had tricked him.

"And I take it that you live here, too," says he in a steely voice.

"Yes," says Scoop.

"And all that stuff you handed out to me at the cave about a cruel step-father and about being in jail was nothing but trumped-up stories?"

"Pretty much so," says Scoop.

Then he told the man about the detective and about the ten thousand dollars, explaining how we happened to go to the cave. He made it clear that the only reason why we hadn't returned the twins to the mother was because we couldn't find them in the pest house. There were several things he didn't tell; but he told enough to give the man a pretty good idea of what happened.

"And you're positive the twins aren't here?" says he in alarm, when Scoop finished.

"There isn't a particle of doubt about it," says Scoop.

"But we've got to find them," says the man, a determined look settling over his face. "Either the detective has them or the father has. One of you kids slip out the front way and see if the automobile is still in the lane. If it is, get as close to it as you can without anyone seeing you. Find out if the twins are in it. If you make an important discovery hurry back and let me know."

"You go Peg," says Scoop, giving Peg the wink. We didn't want the man to know til later that we had the father of the twins locked in number six. It struck me at the moment that the twins could be in the automobile. I was glad the man suggested looking for them there.

We were busy searching the parlor and lower hall for clues when Peg returned.

"There ain't a thing in the auto," says he.

"Wasn't the father of the twins there?" says the man.

Peg shook his head.

"I looked the auto over from radiator to rear axle and didn't find a trace of the twins or the fatman or anyone."

At this point the two woman trailed in through the front door. They clung to each other, looking white and frightened.

"We were afraid---out there in the dark," says Nina to her brother, a tremor in her voice. "It seemed we waited for hours."

The mother of the twins touched Nina's brother on the hand with a trembling hand. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Where are my babies?" says she.

The man told her what had happened, about the detective making his escape and about the mysterious disappearance of Red and the twins. When he finished she let out a wail that made our hair stand on end.

"Oh, heaven help me!" says she, wringing her hands despairingly. "I have lost my babies--my darling babies!"

Scoop gave me a worried look. He was thinking about the fat man in number six, hoping the rumpus wouldn't awake him.

"Better cut out the noise," says he.

"There's people sleeping upstairs."

This seemed to put a new thought into the mother's mind. She turned toward Scoop, holding out her hands imploringly.

"I must see them," says she. "Go to them---beseech them to come to me. They surely know something about my babies; and if they have hearts in their bodies they'll help me."

"Honest ma'am, they don't know a thing about your babies," says Scoop, says Scoop. "No one in the house knew about the twins being here but us fellows."

"But I must see them," says the mother hysterically. She was the next thing to being crazy. I was scared she would have a fit.

It was then that Paddy Gorbett came tumbling pellmell into the pest house, looking for all the world like a wild man. In the chase after the detective he had lost his hat and coat. His dirty shirt was ripped up the back. The sleeves dangled. His bloodshot eyes seemed to flash fire. I didn't blame the women for cowering behind Nina's brother and screaming. I guess they thought Paddy was a sure enough wild man. The way he flourished the shotgun was enough to scare the wits out of anyone.

Scoop and Peg and I beat it for the stairs. We could see that Paddy was dangerous. Certainly we didn't want to get

a charge of bird-shot. The man, though, as he shielded the women, seemed unable to move.

"Good heavens!" says he, his eyes bulging. We hadn't told him about Paddy. That was one of the things we had overlooked. It came to me then like a flash that we had overlooked telling the people that the house they were in was a pest house and not just an ordinary house. With the disappearance of Red and the twins occupying the front part of our minds, we had forgot all about the small-pox cases.

"Move!" says Paddy, squinting along the shotgun barrel. "T'other slicker got away from me, but you 'ns ain't a-goin to, by heck! Consarn yo', move! Git upstairs, every last one of yo'. If I catch yo' down here ag'in to-night I'll fill yo' full of bird-shot."

Nina's brother turned to Scoop.

"Is this some trick?" says he grimly.

"No," says Scoop, struggling for words to explain the situation. We had bungled things, that was certain.

"Who's this man?"

"He's the guard," says Scoop.

"The guard?"

"Yes," says Scoop.

"Is this an insane asylum?"

"It isn't an insane asylum; it's a pest house," says Scoop.

"A what?"

"A pest house. We've all got the smallpox. The detective has the smallpox and Miss Gardner and Clarence and---"

"My babies!" says the mother with a shriek, throwing up her hands in despair.

"My babies in a pest house Exposed to smallpox! Oh! Oh!"

CHAPTER XVI

We thought for a moment the mother of the twins was going to faint, which would have made an awful mess of things. But she didn't. Maybe the sight of Paddy squinting along the shotgun barrel scared her so she couldn't faint. He certainly looked fierce. I guess Nina's brother began to realize he was taking chances standing there with the shotgun aimed at his breast. He started to back off toward the stairs, the women still shielding themselves behind him. Every time he took a step backward Paddy took a step forward. When we were well up the stairs he dragged an armchair to the foot of the stairs and seated himself, pointing the shotgun in our direction.

Mrs. Maloney heard the racket. Realizing that something was out of the ordinary was taking place, she made a supreme effort to disregard her lame knee and limped into the hall. When she saw all the people I thought she was going to keel over.

"What the divil---! Sure, is it a surprise party?" says she sharply.

"Are you running this place?" says the man, stepping up to her.

"It looks to me like it's runnin' itself," says she angrily.

"We want to get out of here," says the man.

"Suppose you get out the way you got

in," says Mrs. Maloney spunkily.

"Call off your guard and we will," says the man, pointing down to where Paddy was seated at the foot of the stairs.

"Indeed I won't," says Mrs. Maloney, snapping out her words. "I don't know what you came here for; but I know that as long as you're here you're going to stay. We don't allow people runnin' in and out of this place just as they please. Maybe you can get out when you've been fumegated, but that's something for the doctor to decide."

"But my babies---" says the mother, holding out her hands imploringly to Mrs. Maloney.

"I have nothing to do with your babies," says Mrs Maloney.

"You must let us go from here---I must find them," says the mother.

"Sure I suppose you'd like to get out so that you can arrange to come back later with the rest of your family and make it a real party," says Mrs. Maloney sarcastically. "Let you out? Never! And it's thinkin' I am you'll be better off if you go to bed."

No one cared about going to bed, least of all the mother of the twins. She sat on the top step, leaning against Nina, crying one minute and coaxing Paddy the next to let her out. She offered him a

lot of money, but he didn't hedge an inch.

We were in hopes that Paddy would go to sleep and give us a chance to slip by him, but he didn't. He sat there in the chair never blinking an eye.

Scoop took Peg and Me to one side.

"What are we going to do?" says he.

"I guess we'll do exactly what Paddy want's us to do," says I.

"But we can't wait around like this forever," says he. "Good night! With Red in trouble, we ought to do something to help him. Can't you think of something we can do, fellows?"

"Even if Paddy weren't keeping us up here at the point of a shotgun, what could we do?" says Peg. "We don't know which way to turn---we haven't a clue or anything. It looks to me as though we've got to wait here til Old Doc shows up in the morning. They'll be something doing when he comes stepping in here and finds all these people."

Notwithstanding the seriousness of the situation, Scoop gave a grin.

"We certainly got a houseful, all right," says he. "Old Doc'll sure have a fit."

"I'm thinking we'll be out of this place before very many hours," says Peg grimly.

"When Old Doc comes I'm going to tell him the truth about the wax spots; and I'm going to call up dad, and you fellows better call up your dads. We've got to

get out of here. I've had enough."

"It'll soon be daylight," says I, pointing out through a window to where a dim light was beginning to show in the east.

By this time the mother of the twins had quieted down and was weeping softly on Nina's shoulder. Nina appeared to be awfully tired and fagged out. But she was game. She kept patting the mother on the head, telling her everything would come out all right.

"Maybe this trouble has been sent to me as a punishment, Nina," says the mother. "I've been thinking of that."

"But you've done nothing to be punished for," says Nina.

"Oh, but I have, Nina! I've been terribly wicked. I can see it now. I've been selfish and unreasonable. I should have been more patient with my husband, Nina. I should not have threatened to divorce him the first time we had a serious disagreement. I should have been more patient and less selfish."

"But he has acted cruel, Missy, in trying to get your babies away from you."

"He isn't cruel, Nina, I can see now that he loves them. He's gruff and cross, I know. But he always was good to me in his way. I didn't realize it at the time ---somehow I never fully realized it till this minute."

"There, there, Missy," says Nina.

"I've made a terrible mistake," says the woman in a tired way. Her face so white and sad-looking I felt sorry for her.

"But everything will come out all right, Missy," says Nina. "We'll find the babies when we get out of here. Then you'll have them to comfort you."

"It was a terrible mistake," says the mother. "But it's too late to rectify it now. Oh, it's too late!"

"Yes, it's too late," says Nina softly. Scoop nudged me.

"Maybe it is and maybe it ain't," says he.

"What do you mean?" says I.

"Maybe we can do her a good turn," says he.

"How?" says I.

"Wouldn't it be a good turn if we could fix it so she'll not only get her babies back, but the father of them, as well?"

"I reckon it would," says I.

"She's willing enough to make up with him. You heard what she said."

"Maybe he won't be so willing," says I.

"We'll make him willing," says Scoop.

"How you going to do it?" says I.

"You just come along and see," says Scoop.

I gave Peg the signal and we followed Scoop down the hall to room number five.

Unlocking the closet door we passed through into room number six. The fat man was still sleeping. Scoop raised the window shade, letting the grey light of early morning into the room. Then he shook the man.

"It's five o'clock," says he.

The man seemed uncertain as to where he was. He sat up and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"What's the matter?" says he with a yawn.

"It's five o'clock," says Scoop. "You asked us to call you at five."

"Oh---much obliged," says the man. He got up from the bed and reached for his vest.

"What time does your garage open?" says he.

"About six-thirty," says Scoop. "You've got lots of time."

"Can I get breakfast uptown?"

"You'll find a restaurant right beside the garage," says Scoop.

The floor creaked as the man moved about.

"Better be quiet as you can," says Scoop.

"What's the idea?"

"On account of the lady just outside the door. She's in trouble, I guess."

"Who is she?"

"She's from Chicago," says Scoop.

"She's awfully pretty. I understand she's in town looking for her twin babies---"

"What?" says the man, cutting in.

"Didn't I tell you to be quiet?" says Scoop sharply. "We mustn't didturb her. She put in a bad night. It's pretty sad. She keeps talking about her husband and calling for her babies all the time."

The man was breathing hard.

"For heaven's sake!" says he. "Say that again, kid. I must be dreaming."

Scoop repeated what he had said. The man seemed to be in a daze. Then he began shooting questions at scoop, his voice very low and strained. There was a grim, tragic look about his eyes and mouth. When he asked if he could have a look at the woman we knew he was willing to make up, all right. That gave us a happy feeling. A fellow always feels that way when he does something that brings happiness to other people. I was glad now that Scoop thought up the idea of bringing the father and mother together. I can't think up fine schemes like that as easy as Scoop.

Scoop let a thoughtful look come into his face.

"I don't know as I ought to let you see her," says he slowly. He was acting it out pretty good.

The man was fearfully sober and tense.

I could see his fat hands clasping and unclasping, as though he was all nervous and excited inside.

"You must let me see this---this woman," says he. I--I have a very important reason---I can't tell you about it, but it --means a great deal to me."

"Well, maybe----" began Scoop thinking hard.

"Show me where she is."

"If you promise not to disturb her---" says Scoop.

"I promise," says the man, cutting in.

"And you won't awaken her?"

"No. I---I just want to see her. You boys are too young to understand---"

"Maybe," says Scoop. "Anyway, you wait here. I'll see if the coast is clear."

Peg and I waited in number six till Scoop came back a few minutes later. His eyes were shining, and we knew that in some way or another he had succeeded in getting the mother of the twins into room number five.

"It'll be all right," says he to the man. "You can go in through this door. Now mind and don't disturb her."

The man's lips were so white I wondered if something was painting him inside. We watched him go in through the door. Then Scoop closed the door after him.

"It ain't right to listen in," says he.

"Let's go back to the hall."

He had the key of number six, so he unlocked the door and we went out into the hall. The door of number five was closed. But sometimes doors don't always hold back sounds and we could hear the murmur of happy voices. Scoop's scheme was working out fine.

Nina and her brother had no suspicion of what was going on till the door of number five opened and the fat man came into the hall. The mother of the twins was hanging to his arm, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. Nina sprang to her feet, looking wild. So did her brother. It was an awful shock to both of them.

"Oh Nina! I'm so happy," says the mother.

"He still loves me--he has always loved me. We have found ourselves. And we're going to begin our lives all over again. We're going to find our babies and go back home. And we're going to live down this awful experience, Nina. I'm going to be happy again."

Then the mother took Scoop by surprise and gave him an awful hugging. Poor Scoop! He couldn't help himself a bit. He tried to break away. It wasn't any use. The more he wiggled the tighter she held him. She even kissed him! I knew how miserable Scoop was. She

called him her little hero and said he was a brave, good boy. Then she hugged him some more. I'm glad it wasn't me. When she got through hugging and kissing him some of the grease was on the end of her nose that Scoop had on his face. It made her look funny.

I think it was then we heard Paddy Gorbett give an awful screech. And when we raced to the head of the stairs, there he was pointing his shotgun at the big grandfathers clock in the lower hall. THE CLOCK WAS MOVING! Not the door of the clock, but the clock itself. It was sliding to one side as slick as you please. I didn't blame Paddy for being scared out of his wits. When he got a glimpse of something white behind the clock he gave another six- cylinder screech and dashed pellmell out of the pesthouse. To this day he swears it was a ghost. It was Red. And the white thing that Paddy had seen was the dress of one of the twins.

CHAPTER XVII

We were down the stairs in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Gee, we were glad to see Red alive! He isn't very pretty, but he's awfully useful when it comes to having fun. He's a good pal, Red is. If anything serious had happened to him I don't know what we would have done.

With a big grin on his freckled face he told us how he happened to stumble on to the cubby hole back of the clock and had thought what a lot of fun it would be to hide in there and surprise us. Then he dropped asleep.

We crowded around him and the mother of the twins tried to hug him and the twins at the same time. We were all feeling pretty happy. Nina took a hand at hugging him, too. It's funny how a woman always wants to hug a kid when he does something that pleases her. It was a cinch Red wasn't keen for the hugging. But he had to stand for it.

The fat man was just as happy as the rest of us. He went around shaking hands with everybody, saying we were fine boys, and complimentary things like that.

But it was getting daylight. And as there was a possibility of Paddy returning to the pest house with Old Doc, the father and mother decided to play safe by heading to Chicago without further delay. We helped them carry the twins to the big automobile. Then they all piled in, the two men in the front seat and the two women in the back seat, holding the twins.

Gee! They had gotten us into a peck of trouble---doubled our troubles for fair---but we did hate to see the little rascals go. They were wide awake. As the car backed out of the lane and headed down the pike they yelled like sixty, just as though they wanted to stay with us for ever.

An hour later I was home. So were Peg and Scoop and Red. Mother and Dad nearly had a fit when they saw me; and when I told them what had happened at the pest house, and about the wax spots, Dad sputtered around and said he didn't know which to do first--lock Old Doc up in the insane asylum or take me to the basement and warm the seat of my pants.

There was a lot of excitement in town when the people heard the story. The

state health officer came to Tutter and examined Miss gardner and Clarence and went away laughing. I guess by this time everybody in town was laughing, with the exception of old Doc. There wasn't anything the matter with Miss. Gardner and Clarence except some kind of an itch. It was contagious but not serious.

School opened wednesday and I was glad to go back. It wasn't so much fun skipping school, after all.

Just now Scoop and Red and Peg and I are looking forward to Christmas. When Christmas-time comes we're going to spend our vacation in Chicago. The fat man is going to pay our carfare. He's going to take us to shows, and out to Lincoln park to see the animals. We're planning on having the time of our lives.

And that isn't all. If you ever come to Tutter in the summertime you'll find us fellows riding four of the classiest bicycles in the country. The cost the fat man a lot of money, I guess. He says that in blocking the detective's game of trying to collect ten thousand dollars from him we had more than earned them.

We never heard what became of the detective. But we aren't anxious to have him return to Tutter--- I'll say not!

THE END

THE SECRET OF THE JADE THRONE

CHAPTER I

The interurban car bearing Dick Froman from Stanton to Darmont crashed through the curtain of impenetrable darkness that shrouded the foothills. So great was the speed of the car over the rough roadbed that the electric motors and the vibration of the loose-fitted windows seemed at times to synchronize with a terrific roar. This, instead of disturbing Dick, tended, if anything, to lull him into the land of kaleidoscopic dreams.

Half asleep, half awake, he slowly became conscious of the fact that the car was making unusual--almost hazardous speed. Straightening up in his seat he rubbed his eyes; then yawned and glanced out of the window. In order to see anything at all of the outside world he had to press his nose against the grimy glass. Even then his only glimpses of the fleeting landscape were made possible by the intermittant flashes of the trolley as it

dripped fire in passing under the cross-arms.

"Gee, it's a dark, spooky night," he mused.

Jiggled about in his seat, he lost himself in ill-natured meditation. Why had his father telephoned that order to the garage owner at Stanton? It was at professor Froman's suggestion that Dick had driven the family automobile from Darmont to Stanton, to be inspected at the garage where the car had been purchased. But nothing had been said by the elder Froman about leaving the car there.

Yet, when Dick had driven into the garage late that afternoon, the owner had advised him that Professor Froman had telephoned that Dick was to leave the automobile there and return to Darmont on the ten o'clock interurban car. The reason? The garage owner had none to advance. He was simply delivering the message he had received. An inspection of the car brought out that everything was ship-shape, and there was no apparent reason why it should not be driven back to Darmont. Amazed and mystified, Dick had tried unsuccessfully to get his father on the telephone.

But though nettled in the extreme, it never occurred to him to do other than carry out his father's instructions. Dick was a scout; and he knew what a true scout

would do under the circumstances. He procured an early supper at a restaurant, then dropped into a moving picture show. It was nine-fifteen when he came out and crossed the square to the interurban station.

"Dad's funny," Dick moodily growled to himself as the car hurtled over the rails. "I guess, though, all college professors are funny--certainly they are at Darmont Academy. Sometimes I wish dad were a--a truck driver or something. Anything but a college professor. And since he's been writing his book on 'Crime Influences' he's been acting queerer than ever."

Dick, of course, was in exactly the right frame of mind to exaggerate his father's eccentricities. And it wasn't to be expected of him that he should fully appreciate the importance of the work that professor froman was engaged in.

As the chief instructor in the psychological laboratory of the Darmont Academy, Professor Froman saw fit to live his life in a study of mental sequences and reactions. His experiments had been many and varied--some very elaborate--some highly ludicrous. In the study of the mind he had developed to the point where he could direct a person's thoughts through suggestion and "staged" environment. During

the past year he had devoted himself to a study of crime--firm in the belief that it could be combated through the employment of creative psychology. He was wont to draw word pictures of the dominant influences of environment on the mind, contending that the majority of criminals were such because of their surroundings. He argued: There are undeveloped goodly impulses in all men, and these goodly impulses will come to the surface and dominate the man's actions if he is made to see that it is his environment that prompts him to criminal processes. He will then feel inclined to flee from the environment that is making him a criminal--and when he is in that state of mind society can make him an honest, law abiding citizen, by surrounding him with a "creative" environment.

Professor Froman's theory received little encouragement from Gaston Moran, a rather grizzled veteran of the Secret Service. Here was a man who had come in contact with various kinds of crime, local and international. And in his heart there was little sympathy for criminals. He contended that a criminal was such because it was "the easier way" of attaining certain desired ends. He could not conceive that a criminal would feel prompted to flee from an environment

that was having a part in making him a criminal, upon learning that environment was having this effect upon him. Crime, according to this idea, was purely a voluntary process.

Dick had heard the two scientists argue the matter in all its fine points in his father's library. But, of late, though the retired Secret Service agent had spent many evenings at the Froman home, Dick had overheard no heated discussions. On several occasions he found the men with their heads together, absorbed in deep, guarded conversations. They had made extended motor trips into the foothills, being away for a day or two at a time. Where had they been? Dick had enquired, but his father had given evasive, absent-minded replies. This was the situation on the night that Dick was returning to Darmont on the interurban car.

The electric line between Stanton and Darmont traverses a winding course of thirty-odd miles, passing for the most part through a lonely, hilly section. Farm houses are few and far between; and in the more rugged section there are no farms at all. From the unevenness of the roadbed Dick knew that the car was now laboring up Bald Hill. Then would come the perilous dip into Lost River Valley, with its jagged rocky bluffs. Dick had heard of people getting lost in

these hills.

His train of thoughts was suddenly interrupted and he glanced up with an exclamation of surprise when a swarthy-faced stranger, with penetrating black eyes, dropped into the seat on which he had perched his feet.

"Are you Richard Froman?" the man inquired, Regarding Dick intently.

"Yes sir." the latter replied.

"I have a rather strange message for you--from your father. But first, I must ask you if you have the courage to follow where your father has directed that I lead you, though it may appear to you at times that you are being placed in the gravest of danger?"

Dick was amazed. He stared at the stranger, his lower jaw sagging. Who was this man, and what did the man mean by reference to a message from his father? That, in itself, would suggest that his father was in trouble--was facing some great danger.

"I see you are confused," the man went on, never removing his penetrating eyes from Dick's troubled face. "I will explain in more detail: I have a letter for you--to be delivered on condition. It was given to me this afternoon by your father--shortly after you left Dartmouth. It orders you, as his son and heir, to go with me where I lead, without ques-

tion. But I am reminded to tell you that you cannot go unless you have unusual courage and confidence in yourself to do what is right under all circumstances. I may say that if you go with me you will find yourself in the grip of a most amazing situation. And I cannot promise that you will not sacrifice your life. What is your answer?"

"I am bewildered!" cried Dick. "What is the meaning of this? Why should my father send a message to me in this mysterious way? Is he in trouble? And can I help him by going with you?"

"You overlook a point I made: You are to ask no questions."

"But how am I to know that my father really wants me to go with you" and if he feels that I should go with you, why should I be kept in the dark as to where I am going? Can't you see how I feel? And isn't it possible for you to give me some inkling of what is likely to happen if I do go with you?"

The man on the instant appeared grave.

"I have no answer to those questions," he said shortly. "Unless you can go with me on the conditions that I just mentioned, I must proceed without you." Rising, he pressed a button and the car slowed down. "Of course if you lack that fine courabe that your father seems to feel you have, and are a coward--"

"I am no coward!" flared Dick, setting his teeth together grimly. "I've never run from danger yet. And if the message you say you have proves that it is my father's wish that I go with you, I'll go."

At this the man took a paper from his coat pocket and handed it to Dick. The latter recognized his father's handwriting. The message read:

Dear Richard:

I am stunned in the face of the amazing thing. It seems that you alone can save yourself. I have confidence in your courage to do right. Go with Count Monray, Richard. He will tell you what you should know--yet there will be much that he dare not tell you. Good-bye and may God watch over and help you, my son.

Your Father.

The Strange note, if anything, intensified Dick's dazed mental condition. Plainly, he was face to face with a mystery and adventure of amazing proportions. He had not the slightest idea what it could be. But his father had called to him, and whatever was required of him he would do his part--the part of a true son and a scout. Even in the face of the gravest dangers he would not falter.

Strangely enough, he experienced no

sense of fear. He was gripped with the wonder of the thing, yet his nerves were cool and steady. A strange curiosity possessed him. What would happen next? Of one thing he was certain: He would come out victorious in the end. He might find himself in danger--might come within an inch of losing his life--but in the end he would triumph.

He regarded his companion with a mixture of curiosity and interest. So the man was a Count. This appealed to Dick's imagination. Count Monray! A musical name, truly. It suggested strange lands, moated castles and feudal conflicts. It brought before his mind a picture of warm-blooded, impulsive warriors in glittering armor, gallant knights--and mystery.

He was brought out of his reverie by the grinding, jerky pause of the car. For the first time he became conscious of the fact that he and the stranger were the only passengers in the car. This was odd, and on the instant defied explanation. Then he had a glimpse of the conductor. THE MAN WAS MASKED! As Dick stepped from the car he saw a sign in one of the windows:

SPECIAL CAR

So he had been brought to this lonely spot in a special car? For what purpose? Plainly, everything had been most carefully arranged--even to his father's sug-

gestion that he drive to Stanton and the subsequent telephone order to leave the car there and return on the interurban.

Dick found himself standing in a rutted road. As the electric car droned into action and disappeared in the distance, he had to reach out and touch his companion to make certain that he was not alone. Then two shafts of light pierced the intense darkness--the headlights of an automobile. A starter churned, followed by the purr of a high powered motor.

"Come this way", the man directed, touching Dick on the arm.

Dick followed his companion into the rear seat of the automobile. He knew something about motor cars and from the "feel" of the deep cushions, and the purr of the motor, realized that the automobile was an aristocrat in its world.

He was given the opportunity to immerse himself in his own thoughts as the motor car picked its way along the rough road. One minute it was grinding up a steep incline on low gear; then descending at a hazardous angle, the sound of the brakes breaking the stillness of the hills. Only the vaguest outline of the driver was discernable, but Dick sensed it was a man.

Jolted about, Dick gave free play to his thoughts and tried to arrive at a solution of the amazing mystery. He

imagined that such things could very well happen in far off countries. But in America!--with cities a short distance in any direction!

What was the danger that confronted his father? Was it a matter of money? Was his father being held in the hills for ransom?

Then the picture took a new angle for him. His father, he knew, was foreign born. Always he had maintained a silence over the happenings of his youth. Could this have a bearing on the trouble now confronting him? That seemed probable. Dick gasped at the thought. And the man beside him--Count Monray--was plainly a native of some foreign land. Could it be that this foreign nobleman had come to his father with certain demands? If so, what?

Certain that he was getting a foothold in a solution of the mystery, Dick reached out and touched his companion.

"You must imagine how I feel--the uncertainty," said he slowly. "Everything is done to mystify and confuse me. But I believe I understand. Tell me, if you may: Do you know my father very well?"

It was several seconds before the man replied in the affirmative. Plainly, he had deliberated before answering Dick's question.

"Have you known him very long?" Dick followed up.

Again he was given an affirmative reply.

"Did you know him when he was a boy like me--before he came to America?"

It seemed to Dick that the man stifled a cry. But that was his only answer. The question was repeated, but the man maintained a deep silence.

The motor car followed the lonely road for hours. Once a rear wheel dropped into a hole and Dick and the Count got out and helped get the car back on the road. But throughout this no word passed between the chauffeur and Dick's companion.

They were now traveling in a most rugged and deserted section of the country. The road wound in and out at the foot of a rocky bluff that towered into the gloom far beyond the reach of the headlights. On the other side of the road could be heard at times the churning of a mountain stream.

Of a sudden the car slackened and came to a pause. Count Monray placed a hand on Dick's knee.

"I suggest you prepare yourself for a most extraordinary demonstration," he said.

Dick gritted his teeth. He had determined to see the thing through. His fighting spirit was fully aroused.

"Im prepared for anything," he answer-

ed grimly.

"Do you believe in magic?" was the amazing query.

"I will believe in it if you ask me to," Dick replied.

"Very well. We get out here."

They left the car and followed a ledge-like path up the side of the bluff, the Count taking the lead, lighting the way with a pocket flashlight. Dick was fully conscious of his danger. The path was but a few feet wide. A single misstep and he would be dashed on the jagged rocks many feet below. It was a warm night, and the sweat came out on his forehead and rolled down his face.

At length they came to the crown of the bluff. Count Monray lead the way along a faintly marked trail, passing into the deep forest. He paused before what appeared to be a huge wonderfully-carved chest.

"Did you ever hear of the Carpet from Bagdad?" he questioned.

"It was a magic carpet--wasn't it?" Dick returned uncertainly.

"Yes. You may recall it was credited with the facility for transporting people over vast distances in the wink of an eye. It may be your opinion that no such carpet existed. As to that I cannot say. That there could have been such a carpet, you will presently see for yourself.

"We are about to deliver ourselves into the Chest of Solomon. It is said that the chest was carved from the wood of sacred trees and presented to King Solomon by Holy Men at the time his marvelous temple was nearing completion. Later on the chest, highly prized by King Solomon, was stolen from the temple. I have no way of telling you how it arrived at this spot. But it is here, as you can see. It has much the same magical powers claimed for the Bagdad Carpet. It will take us where we want to go. Do you believe me when I tell you that?"

"I can't," Dick faltered. "It seems impossible to me that a chest can carry people through the air--"

"But you assured me that you were willing to believe in magic. If you are to proceed further with me you must become possessed of a highly receptive mind. You will find yourself in a most amazing situation, and it will be difficult for you to accept the view of things that I will give you. Yet, this is imperative. You must force yourself to believe in what you will see and in what will happen to you. Are you willing to deliver yourself into the Chest of Solomon, and believe, as I believe, in its magic qualities?"

"Yes," Dick answered slowly.



DICK FOLLOWED HIS MYSTERIOUS GUIDE ALONG
THE PERILOUS LEDGE-LIKE PATH.

At this the Count handed Dick the flash light and produced a key from his pocket. Unlocking the chest he threw the cover back, motioning for Dick to climb in. He then followed, lowering the cover. Instantly there was a clicking sound from without. When Dick tried to raise the cover he found that it was locked.

Then he became aware of a peculiar sensation. THE CHEST SEEMED TO BE MOVING! He could hear the air whistling about it, as though it was hurtling through space.

"Where are we going?" he cried, unable to maintain silence.

"To Granzart," the Count replied.

"Granzart? What do you mean by that?"

"Granzart is a mountain kingdom--the most wonderful kingdom in the world. I am not permitted to tell you where it is. You may assume, though, that it is a vast distance from your home in America."

"I must be crazy!" Dick cried, all the logic in his mind battling for expression.

"No you are not crazy," replied the Count gently.

"But what can it mean?" Dick demanded anxiously.

"You shall know in due time," assured the Count.

Some time later the chest seemed to come to rest. Then the lock clicked. The count lifted the cover. Daylight

flooded the chest, causing dick to blink and shield his eyes.

"Why, I thought it was night?" he cried in amazement.

A smile lighted up the face of his companion.

"You must know when it is night on one side of the world it is day on the other side."

Dick scrambled out of the chest and glanced about him with supreme curiosity. On all sides were towering pine trees. They filled the atmosphere with a rare fragrance, and he filled his lungs happily.

"This is Granzart," said the Count passionately. Removing his hat he crossed his hands on his breast, bowing his head. There was a world of reverence to his action. "We are a very proud people in Granzart," he added, "Yet we admire your great america, and have adopted your language, as you presently shall see. I must now beg of you to proceed me." He indicated a path that trailed off into the distance.

Dick led the way as directed. Soon the path merged with a rough mountain road. An elderly man came toward them carrying a shepherd's crook and driving a flock of sheep. He was dressed in clothes the like of which Dick had never seen before except in comic opera. His shirt was a

baggy brown blouse of heavy homespun cloth. His trousers came only to his knees. A home-made straw hat crowned his grey head. At sight of Dick and the Count he made the sign of a triangle on his breast. Dick observed that his companion returned this signal.

"What news have you, Sire Vodder?" the Count inquired pleasantly.

"There is little news in Granzart, and such misery, your excellency," the old man returned in a cracked voice, nodding his head slowly. "I am most unhappy under the rule of the tyrant Bassio; and have almost despaired of deliverance. It would be news, Your excellency, to learn of Bassio's exile or imprisonment."

"Take heart, Sire Vodder. The hour is drawing near when the good people of Granzart shall be delivered from the tyrannical and bloody rule of this upstart. Bassio."

"He calls himself a President of the people," the old man said with passion.

"Ah! He is indeed a rogue. He robs the granaries and cellars of the Loyalists to pay his soldiers for preserving his position as self-appointed dictator."

The old man passed on, nodding his head and mumbling unhappily to himself. Count Monray, on the instant, seemed depressed and lost himself in serious reflection. Dick, too, was thoughtful as he plodded

along the mountain road. Much had happened during the past few hours to supply him with fuel for thought.

The road, overshadowed with shadowing trees, improved as they proceeded further into the country. Then, on rounding a turn, Dick caught sight of a turreted stone castle just ahead.

"We must pause here," the Count directed. He called Dick's attention to a rustic bench to one side of the road. They seated themselves and waited in silence.

From down the road came the creaking of a cart. Soon it came into view, a two-wheeled affair, drawn by a lazy donkey. The driver was dressed in much the same style as the old shepherd, though he wore a cap instead of a hat. There appeared to be no springs to the cart and as the heavy wheels climbed over the stony hummocks in the rough road, the driver was jostled about. The box, back of the seat, was piled high with new mown hay, in which a hay fork stood upright.

At the sight of Dick and the Count, the driver brought the donkey to a halt and gave the same signal that the shepherd had given. The Count returned the signal and stepped forward.

"I have been highly anxious as I waited here for you, Byoa."

"There is no cause for alarm, Your Ex-

cellency," the man returned earnestly.

"Good! I'm glad to hear you say that. It is assurance that our plans were given no setback while I have been away.."

"We have most zealously carried out your instructions, Your excellency, and I will stake my life that the pig of a Bassio knows nothing of our intentions"

"I would whisper in your ear, Byoa," the Count said, stepping close to the cart. Byoa leaned over and listened intently. When he raised his head and glanced at Dick a wonderful light shone in his eyes. He removed his cap and bowed. Dick was uneasy. He could see that the Count had told Buoa something about him. What?

"We have progressed with our plans to a point where we must proceed with extreme caution," Count Monray said passionately. "You say, Byoa, that Bassio knows nothing of our intentions. But are you sure? What is there to prevent him from having a spy among the soldiers of the outer guard? We must be careful in approaching the castle. It is well that we planned to use your cart. But you are sure, Byoa, you can enter the castle grounds and carry through your part of the plan successfully?"

"I am, Your Excellency."

"Then we will loose no time." The Count turned to Dick. "I must now in-

trust you to our comrade, Byoa who will guard your safety to the point of sacrificing his own life. It is necessary that you be taken into the palace that you see yonder, and this without the knowledge of the outer guards. There may be traitors among them. Should a hireling of a pig of a Bassio learn your identity, every measure possible would be taken to dispose of you--and Bassio and his kind do not hesitate to use violence.

"Byoa will see that you get within the gates, by concealing you under the hay. I beg of you to remain so concealed until all danger has passed and he instructs you to come forth."

While the Count was speaking, Byoa forked back the hay, providing a nest for Dick. The latter climbed into the cart and was quickly covered. Then the cart rattled along the road, Byoa whistling a merry tune.

Dick's heart beat wildly. He knew not what was likely to happen to him. Certainly, the gravity of the Count's voice was sufficient to cause him keen anxiety. Covered by the hay, he had a miserable feeling of being trapped--shut in. He fought against a desire to make a peek-hole in the hay, so that he would have a knowledge of what was going on about him. But he dared not run the risk.

Soon he heard people talking and sensed that he was nearing the palace. The road was smooth here. Then he heard a gruff voice challenge the driver of the cart:

"What is your business?"

"A jag of hay for the imperial stables, sir. It is brought at the order of the Chief Hostler--"

"Are you sure you have nothing concealed in the hay?"

"Byoa laughed merrily.

"And what would it be your pleasure for me to have concealed under the hay, my fine soldier? A pretty lassie, eh? Indeed, I am a clever magician. I reach into the hay--and here is an ivy leaf!"

Dick heard the guard catch his breath sharply. Plainly, the ivy leaf was a symbol that distinguished Byoa as belonging to a secret brotherhood.

"Drive on quickly," the guard ordered in a tense voice. "And beware of the stable guard. I have my suspicions of that fellow."

As the cart moved forward, Byoa leaned close to the hay and whispered:

"I beg Your Majesty to lie perfectly still. If we are challenged by the stable guard, have no fear as to the outcome. If necessary I will enable you to make your escape by strangling him."

Dick was gripped with anxiety. He could see that he was in grave danger. What the

danger consisted of, and what would happen to him if his presence was became known, he had only the vaguest idea.

While he was resolving the matter in his mind, the driver of the cart was challenged a second time.

"What is your business in the castle grounds, bumpkin?" said a sharp voice.

"A jag of hay for the imperial stables, sir."

"And what is under the hay? I am wise to the tricks of your kind. Ccme, fork it back! The hump looks suspiciously like the hump of a man. Here, give me that fork and i'll soon satisfy myself as to that."

"I beg of you to call the Chief Hostler, sir, and he will assure you--"

"Hand me that fork, you lout--"

Dick gave a gasp when the cart creaked as the guard lifted himself on the wheel hub. Then he heard the thud of falling bodies. He knew, without looking, that Byoa, faithful to his trust, had leaped on to the guard, forcing him to the ground.

Dick sprang to his feet, brushing the hay from the side of his face. Byoa and the guard were struggling on the ground. For an instant Dick was tempted to flee. Then he gritted his teeth and jumped to the ground beside the struggling men. On the instant that he appeared the guard

gained the upper hand in the conflict and would have pierced Byoa with his sword had not Dick leaped forward and crashed his fist into the man's face, sending him on his back, unconscious.

"Quick, Byoa! Let us make our escape," he cried.

"We are surrounded," Byoa cried in dismay. Dick was gripped with despair when he saw guards hurrying to the scene from all directions.

CHAPTER II

The purposeful interference of the stable guard and the subsequent life-and-death struggle between the guard and Byoa, served as a fitting climax to the maze of mystery and adventure that had surrounded Dick Froman since his remarkable advent into the strange kingdom of Granzart.

That he was in great peril, and in the forthcoming moments might even lose his life, Dick realized fully. And the knowledge of this danger brought to him a strange, dogged courage. Without a tremor he momentarily gazed into the white troubled face of his companion; then turned to meet the on-coming guards. No less than twenty of them were rushing to the scene, grimfaced, bayonets drawn for instant action, their gaudy red and white uniforms and plumed hats sparkling kaleidoscopically in the morning sunshine.

Under ordinary circumstances Dick would have been impressed by the beauty of the

scene. In the excitement of the present moment, though, he was but vaguely conscious of the quaint dignity of the turreted stone castle, with its small, prison-like windows, iron-railed balconies and steep red-tiled roof. The castle was seemingly surrounded by a high stone wall, in which were occasional passageways, under constant guard. The castle grounds were beautified with rare flowered plants and shrubs. Native trees reared their heads to a level with the topmost peak of the castle roof. Between the patches of shrubbery were wide stretches of velvety lawn, dotted here and there with white wicker garden seats. To one side a marble fountain lifted its crystal spray into the air, attracting native birds in great numbers.

Byoa's encounter with the stable guard had left him dazed. He crouched in the driveway, his breath coming in violent gasps, his white lips trembling but seemingly unable to shape words that struggled for expression. His shirt of brown, homespun cloth was torn at the throat, exposing the bare breasts across which a livid bleeding cut marked where the guard's sword had grazed the flesh in the perilous instant when Dick saved the life of his companion by felling the stable guard with a well-directed blow full in the face. As a result of Dick's timely

interference, the guard now lay prostrate beside the driveway, his plumed hat several feet away, his sword lying on the turf.

As his eyes lighted on the sword, Dick gave a glad cry. Dashing forward he gained possession of the weapon and struck an attitude of defense, his back to the cart.

"We must fight them off!" he cried to Byoa, who on the instant struggled to his feet and swayed dizzily. By a Herculean effort the man drew himself together. "Give me the sword!" he panted, coming to Dick's side. "I am the stronger; and in the moment that I hold them off you can escape in the cart."

"You are winded," returned Dick. "No; don't interfere with me! Escape must be for both of us or not at all."

"Oh, but it is your duty to flee while you have a chance!" gasped Byoa, distress showing in his great brown eyes. "Willingly do I lay down my own life for my beloved Granzart. It is the least that I can do. But with you, My King, it is different! If harm comes to you, then our cause is forever lost. For many years we have waited our hour of triumph. Now it is very near. I implore you---"

"But Dick seemed not to hear. His eyes were riveted on the guards, now but a few feet away. He could hear their labored

breathing; could read the determination in their faces and in their every grim action.

Like some awful machine set into motion the guards began to close in. Dick gave an involuntary gasp of terror as the points of the bayonets came nearer and nearer, each one seemingly directed at his fast-beating-heart. A sickness akin to death came over him. The sunshine faded and a horrible darkness settled in. He felt himself swaying. In a moment more the bayonets would pierce his body. Then he would sink, never to rise again. From his throat came a cry like the last choking gurgle of a drowning cat. Then:

"On the cart--quick!" Byoa panted in his ear. He felt himself being lifted into the air. And almost on the instant that he dropped on the hay he heard the bayonets crash into the end board of the cart. He shuddered; then got a grip on himself and struggled to his feet as Byoa brought the lines down on the back of the donkey, causing the animal to lurch forward and start madly along the driveway.

Pandemonium reigned among the guards. Their hoarse cries filled the air as the hay cart containing Dick and Byoa careened along the driveway in the wake of the frightened, galloping donkey.

"We are distancing them!" cried Dick, clinging to Byoa's arm. There were no

springs to the odd, home-made cart and in its rough passage over the stony driveway the hay was jostled about and streamed behind like the tail of a comet. The driveway seemed to encircle the castle and Dick was fearful that it would end in a blind passage, whereby further escape would be cut off. In rounding a sharp turn the cart swerved from the driveway and crashed into a tree, then crumpled with a broken wheel. Dick felt himself flying through the air. Landing unharmed on the soft turf, he quickly struggled to his feet. Byoa came running and gripped his arm.

"Quick! This way," panted the man, indicating a shrubbery-bordered path leading to the castle.

The guards had not yet rounded the corner of the castle when Dick and his companion tumbled breathlessly through the narrow door leading into the castle. Just within the door was a flight of stairs. Byoa dashed up the stairs with Dick at his heels. At the head of the stairs Byoa came to a panting pause.

It seemed to Dick that the danger was now twofold. Surely they would be apprehended if they proceeded into the castle; escape by way of the lower door was beyond consideration : Even the massive stone walls and the closed door did not entirely shut out the angry voices of the guards

as they came upon the damaged cart and spread out to affect a capture.

On the instant that Dick and Byoa arrived at the head of the stairs, footsteps sounded down the dimly-lighted passageway. Someone was approaching! Dick's heart stood still. Who more likely than an armed guard who had witnessed from a window their escape from the damaged cart and now approached to take them into custody.

"Oh!" gasped Byoa. His fingers tightened on Dick's arm. To one side a niche indented the wall and into this meager hiding place Byoa drew Dick as the footsteps came nearer.

Presently the form of a man came into view. On his arm he carried a wicker basket, filled to overflowing with soiled linen.

"One of the castle servants," Byoa whispered in Dick's ear.

The man came down the passageway, seemingly unconscious of the presence of Dick and his companion. When he was directly opposite the niche, Byoa sprang forward like a huge cat, sending the surprised servant on to his back. There was no outcry: Byoa saw to that by bringing his palm across the man's mouth in no gentle manner.

"Quick!---take some of the linen from the basket and bind and gag him, " cried

Byoa to Dick, as he kept the struggling servant pinioned to the floor. Dick carried out the instructions----then gave a cry of despair.

CHAPTER III

Small wonder that despair clutched at Dick Froman's heart. He had been hopeful of escape for both himself and his companion, Byoa; now his hopes were dashed to the ground. On the instant that he completed binding and gagging the castle servant, at Byoa's direction, sounds came below. Dick gave an involuntary cry when he saw two guards coming up the stairs, three steps at a bound.

"Down the hall!" gasped Byoa, taking Dick by the shoulders and starting him off. "Oh, be quick! It is your only chance to escape. Hurry, I beg of you."

"I will not leave you while you are in danger," cried Dick with determination. He was surprised at his own voice: it seemed suddenly hoarse and old and wholly strange.

Byoa took hold of the prostrate servant and dragged him into the niche. The man then put on the servant's hat and clut-

ched the wicker basket under his arm.

"I can fool them and make them think I am one of the castle servants," he panted. "There is little danger in the adventure for me; but for you there is the greatest peril. You may even lose your life. I implore you to flee down the hall while there is yet time."

In a fraction of a minute the two guards would arrive at the head of the stairs. There was no time for deliberation. Dick realized this. He came to a speedy decision. Byoa was right. As long as the man was in no evident danger it was best to carry out his directions and seek safety in the depths of the dimly-lighted passageway. Arriving at this view of things, Dick sprinted down the hall. His eyes were accustomed to the gloom and he made rapid progress, running on his toes to make as little noise as possible. Byoa was soon lost to sight.

With no knowledge of where the mysterious passageway was likely to take him, Dick was uncertain as to how far he should proceed. Shortly he came to a massive, locked door. Try as he would he could not budge it. He experienced a nervous chill in the thought of what would happen to him if the guards penetrated his companion's disguise and carried their search past Byoa into the

length of the passageway.

The minutes dragged. Each minute seemed like an hour to Dick as he alternately crouched in the hall and paced the floor. His nerves were tensioned like coiled steel springs. Involuntarily he clenched his fists, determined, if necessary, to wage a bitter fight for his life.

Gripped with uncertainty over what had happened at the head of the stairs, Dick at length retraced his steps down the hall. When he arrived at the place where he had left Byoa, the latter was nowhere in sight. Neither was the servant who had been concealed in the niche. The intense stillness throughout the hall was uncanny. When Dick cautiously descended the stairs he found the lower door locked. Dismayed in no small measure, he again ascended the stairs. Where was Byoa? What had happened to him?

Dick had no way of measuring the passing hours. He had no watch and the sun was not visible from any of the cubby-hole-like windows that pierced the outside wall of the passageway. But he had the feeling that he had been in the hall for a good many hours. The morning sun had been witness to his flight from the castle guards. Now, night must be very near. He was almost famished, not having tasted food since the preceding day.

In those tense moments, cloaked in the

silence of the hall, Dick reviewed his strange adventure and tried to arrive at a better understanding of things. It was not easy. The whole affair seemed like an amazing dream that shaped itself without limitations or logic. He recalled the magic chest. It was absurd, he reasoned, to assume that the chest had actually carried its passengers through the air, across oceans and plains, landing them in the strange mountainous kingdom of Granzart. Yet it really had happened, amazing and unexplainable as it was. Dick was convinced of that. His whole adventure was startling, amazing, unexplainable. The more he revolved the matter in his mind the more confused he became.

He recalled his entrance into the castle grounds in Byoa's hay cart; The interference of the stable guard; his escape with Byoa into the castle. Where was Count Monray, the man who had journeyed with him in the magic chest from America to Granzart? Dick felt he was more or less under this man's protection and somehow had the feeling that if relief were to come to him it would be through an agency of the Count.

Dick was still busy with his jumbled thoughts when he heard a scurrying sound behind him. He turned sharply, fearful on the moment that someone in padded

shoes was about to pounce on him. A mouse scampered into the niche. Dick was grateful for this diversion. Even to have a mouse for company was better than sitting there alone in the gloom, a prey to even gloomier thoughts. He quickly crossed the niche, expecting to find the mouse crouched in a darkened corner. The intruder, though was nowhere in evidence. Nor could Dick locate an opening through which the mouse might have disappeared.

Dick was about to turn away when something impelled him to turn his gaze ceilingward. He gave a cry when he discerned an opening in the ceiling on a line with the wall. It was plain to him now that the mouse had scaled the rough wall and escaped into this opening, through which no ray of light came. Confident that his body would pass through the opening, Dick lost no time tensioning the muscles of his legs, letting himself shoot into the air like a releasing spring. His fingers touched the edges of the opening---held for an instant---then slipped. Panting, he marshalled his full strength and gave another mighty leap. His fingers held! He drew himself up, then dropped panting face downward on the floor.

All was intense darkness about him. After a bit he struck a match to see what sort of place he was in. Just above his head was a slanting roof, so low down

that he could not stand erect. Evidently he was in an attic. Loose boards covered the rafters, and as he moved about these boards rattled in a most alarming manner. The match revealed a door a few feet away. He made for this, reaching it just as the match expired.

Dick was overjoyed when the door opened at his touch. Escape now lay before him. A happy thrill passed through his body. Then he experienced a gloomy reaction. What would escape from the castle mean to him after all? He was in a strange country---thousands of miles from home. He had no money---he had no sense of directions or locations. For all he knew he was likely to find enemies in every home throughout this strange land. How was he to exist? How was he to make his way to the border and ultimately to his home in America?

Slowly he opened the door, careful to make no noise. Daylight bathed his face, momentarily blinding him. Just without the door was a small landing, and beyond that a flight of steps leading down to a wide corridor that stretched into the distance. Dick was of the opinion that this must be the principal corridor of the palace. The high walls were tinted a delicate blue, like the summer sky at noonday, and blue rugs of silken texture covered the polished floor. There was a

certain definite dignity, a certain quietness and reserve in the atmosphere of the place that left its impression on Dick. Indeed, he was in the home of kings was his thought!

Under this new quieting influence, Dick seemed somehow to loose much of his fear. His highly-tensioned nerves slowly relaxed until they were normal and wholly under his control. He started slowly down the stairs, but hurriedly returned to the landing, dropping on to his stomach, when he observed two men approaching.

They appeared to be servants. One was an elderly man, grey of hair and a bit faltering in his steps. His face was deeply wrinkled, yet it was kindly in its expression and Dick felt that the man was not wholly an enemy. The other man carried himself with the spirits and energy of youth. They were engaged in guarded conversation, and as they came even with the foot of the stairs the younger man said with a high measure of impatience: "Pshaw! Why do you affect so much mystery, Cedric? You bore me, my overly cautious friend. With your years you should have better poise and courage and not act so childish. What is there to fear in this deserted corridor? There are no eavesdroppers here. Why then should you entertain such mysterious secrecy when I question you about the strange happenings throughout the castle

this day? Again I ask you, Cedrick, what is the meaning of the confusion?"

The aged servant anxiously glanced up and down the corridor, apparently fearful of the presence of hidden enemies. When he spoke his voice was low and full of feelings.

"We have good reason to be cautious, Arring. You of course, realize that not so well as I, because you are young and impetuous and daring. We know that the tyrant, Bassio--the upstart that elected himself to supreme power throughout Gran-zart when our noble ruler, King Frazonia III, disappeared-----we know that the beast of a man has spies throughout the castle. Even the sign of the ivy leaf does not always protect us. Walls have been known to have ears. For aught we know one of Bassio's spies may lie hidden near us to report our conversation---"

"Nonsense! We can see far up and down the corridor. There is no one in sight. There are no hiding places."

But Cedric was still uneasy.

"Let us be moving on, Arring. We have much work to do this day."

"I would seat myself here to rest," yawned Arring lazily, dropping on to the extreme lower step of the stairs. "Come, have a seat, Cedric," he invited, making room for his companion.

"We must be about our work---"

"I am thinking less of our work than I am of the mysterious disturbance among the Castle Guards this morning," returned Arring. "You have not told me the cause of this, Cedric."

"I do not always tell all I know, Arring. One learns to keep one's own council as one takes on years. Then, too, what one hears is not always true, and does not justify repeating."

"Ah, ha! Then you DO know something? I fancied that. But what have you heard this day, Cedric, that would explain the mysterious commotion in the castle grounds?"

"It is a strange thing that was whispered in my ear, " said Cedric. "Exar, the Count's trusted servant---"

"Count Monray, you mean?"

"Yes. Exar tells me that to-night there will be a new King on the Jade Throne of Granzart."

"Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho!" laughed Arring, slapping his knees boisterously. "You talk like a fairy tale, Cedric. A new King, you say? To reign in Granzart? And what of Bassio---our aspiring hunchback, who has long been in power here? Maybe HE will have something to say about a new king stepping in to relieve him of power. Bassio is not the kind of man to permit that. Has he not even sacrificed human lives to maintain his power and

crush the Loyalists? Were he to learn that an attempt was being made to place a new King on the Jade Throne he would wreak such destruction on the Loyalists that the whole world would ring with the outrage. The streets of Laurentine, our beloved capital city, where Bassio holds sway, would run red with human blood. There would be conflict on every hand and the peaceful homes of our mountain peasants would be ravaged. Bassio would see to this. His soldiers are well-trained to this direction. No, Cedric, I cannot conceive that what you say is true. Exar is making sport of you."

"Monkey that you are!" cried Cedric wrathfully. "Your noisy tongue would try to make amends for the shallowness of your head! You live in your own opinions. Do you not know that for years the Loyalists have been planning against the time Granzart would be delivered from Bassio's rule by the placing of a new King on the Jade Throne? Have you been asleep all these years, Arring? It would seem so from your chatter. The Loyalists, while apparently submissive to Bassio's Dictatorship, have been quietly going ahead with their plans. And to-night, if Exar speaks the truth---"

"Who is this new King, Cedric, who comes into power to-night? Surely not our gracious but unfortunate ruler, Frazonia III.

It is generally conceded that Frazonia has been dead for these many years. I was a youth when he disappeared so mysteriously from this very castle. I have often wondered, Cedric, if he were murdered. It is strange that nothing was ever heard of him. Twenty years have passed since the day of his disappearance."

"Frazonia was not assassinated," returned Cedric with conviction. As the past arose before him he grew tense and grey. His voice became hoarse and his wrinkled hand trembled as it gripped the stair railing. "Our unfortunate King was not assassinated," he repeated. "Was it not I who found the note---" "A note, you say? What note was that, Cedric?"

"Few knew that King Frazonia left a note on the Jade Throne before he elected to disappear. I found the note and delivered it to Count Monray. That was years ago, Arring, but to my dying day every word of that strange note will stand out distinctly in my brain."

Arring arose excitedly and peered into Cedric's agitated face.

"What was in this note that you found, Cedric?"

"IT read: The malignant influence of the Jade Throne is clutching at my heart and destroying it that which is good in me, even as it destroyed the good that was in my father and brought about his

destruction. Indeed the Jade Throne bears the curse of Corran! If I remain King, I shall become a beast, for under the malevolent influence of the Jade Throne my desires daily take a downward trend. I have weighed in the ballance the glories of being king against the satisfaction of being honest and upright. I find that my greatest desire is to remain clean and manly to the end of my seemingly unfortunate life. So I am giving up the Throne of Granzart--- I am going away---away from the evil influence of the Jade Throne'."

"Amazing!" exclaimed Arring tensely. "Why were the people throughout the kingdom not informed regarding this note?"

"As Prime Minister, it was Count Mon-ray's wish that the existence of the note remain a secret. He seemed to feel he could bring about Frazonia's return. Then, too, he did not like to make the note public and thus add fuel to the fire of popular superstition regarding the Jade Throne."

"I never quite believe these stories we hear about the Jade Throne," said Arring. "It seems highly impossible to me that a block of sculptured jade can exert supernatural influences over people. If it possesses life and reasoning---"

"Did not Corran, the great sculptor,

imbue it with evil life when, in wretchedness and misery, he carved it in the castle dungeons? Did he not---"

"But that is only tradition, Cedric. I have sometimes wondered if there was really such a genius as Corran."

"Oh, there is little doubt of that," assured Cedric. "It is indeed true that he existed during the reign of Frazonia I, who caused the immense block of jade to be brought to Granzart from the jungles of New Zealand. It is indeed true that Corran aspired to a dishonest position of affection in the giddy heart of queen Geograna, and was imprisoned by the King when his unworthy intentions were exposed. I have visited the dungeon here in the castle where he was confined, year after year. I have seen the pile of chippings from the great block of jade, transformed at his masterly touch into the marvelous Jade Throne of Granzart. It is all very true, Arring; even those parts of the story where we are told that King Frazonia amused himself by beating Corran with the knout. And I fear it is true that Corran did indeed imbue the work of his supreme genius with a lasting hatred toward the Kings of Granzart, and that the Jade Throne has the powers credited to it. Aw, me! Indeed I would flee if I were elected to ascend the Jade Throne as King of Granzart."

"But to be King is a rare privilege, Cedric. Think of the power and greatness!"

"Think of the price!" Cedric cut in.

"Pshaw! I'd be willing to run the chance of becoming a servant to the Jade Throne's evil influence if I could be King.."

"Again I say, consider the price. Was not Frazonia I found dead on the Jade Throne? And did not Frazonia II die in the same mysterious way?"

"Yes, Cedric; but---"

"And there is the note. Frazonia III wrote his heart into that note. He was conscious of the Jade Throne's evil influences. He---"

"Could not his nerves and his imagination tricked him, Cedric? One's imagination can play tricks on one, you know. A fancied danger becomes real, if cherished constantly in the imagination."

"You talk like a crazy philosopher, Arring."

"I harbor less crazy ideas than you, Cedric. Why, you even forget that Exar is a trickster, and believe his foolish story of his that on this night Frazonia III is due to return to the Jade Throne of Granzart!"

"Not Frazonia, Arring, but his son. Exar tells me that Count Monray has just returned from America, where he has been

in personal communication with Frazonia, who is now living peacefully in that country. It is his son who will reign on the Jade Throne---a youth who bears the name of Richard Froman!"

CHAPTER IV

Picture the surprise of Richard Froman. He had been deeply interested in the conversation of the two servants, Cedric and Arring. Truly, he was in a most strange and picturesque kingdom! This in itself was sufficient to imbue Dick with the warm fire of adventure. He carried in his mind a picture of moated castles that lifted their rugged turrets in medieval style, and from which chivalrous knights went boldly forth to battle, with hearts that knew no fear. Dick liked to think of these things. He liked to picture the knights of his fancy wresting victory for themselves on the field of conflict, defending that which was right and good, so that the world would be a better place in which to live, and oppression of the weak and defenseless would be no more. Such gallantry and bravery were deserving of great reward, and sometimes Dick let his thoughts turn to Lady Beautiful, who

awaited the return of her lover. But the greatest honor came to the knight when even the King bowed before him.

The King! Why, if the old servant spoke the truth, he---Dick Froman--was King! Even in the most fanciful fairy tales no such thing had ever happened. Small wonder that Dick was gripped with mingled amazement and dismay as he lay on his stomach on the stair landing just above Cedric and Arring, yet concealed from them, and listened to their amazing revelations which explained many things to Dick in connection with his strange adventure.

When Cedric, in a voice that trembled with passion, confided in his younger companion that a new King of the house of Frazonia was to ascend the mysterious Jade Throne of Granzart, and this new ruler was none other than the listener, himself, Arring scrambled noisily to his feet. It is well for Dick that Arring did not create this confusion, otherwise Dick's involuntary gasp of amazement might have led to his detection.

"This is amazing!" cried Arring. "You are certain of what you say, Cedric?"

"I am only certain of what Exar breathed in my willing and attentive ear. I understand from Exar that the Count and our young Prince came to Granzart from America last night in King Solomon's chest. They were to have secretly entered the castle

this morning, but a spy of Bassio's detected the young Prince, who was concealed in a hay cart. That was the confusion that you observed in the castle grounds."

"I overheard the guards talking about a youth who escaped them. And this boy is to be our King? Wonderful and amazing! And where is our young Prince at this moment, Cedric?"

"With Count Monray, I imagine."

"And it is a positive fact that he is to ascend the Jade Throne?"

"To-night; so Exar in great secrecy informs me."

"And Bassio is permitting this to take place? It is beyond belief, Cedric!"

"Bassio may have his suspicions that the Loyalists are secretly shaping plans that may interfere with his power; yet he knows nothing of the existence of the young prince."

"But he will learn through his spies of the youth who was detected in the cart--"

"And by that time the young Prince will have ascended the throne of Granzart in the name of his father, Franzonia III. You can picture how the citizens will rally to the support of the new King when his parentage is established. Oh, Arring, we are approaching a great hour! Long have I preyed for such deliverance from Bassio. A youth is to save our beloved

kingdom! See, Arring: I tremble with joy!"

Arring gently touched the elderly patriot on the arm, and when he spoke his voice was tense and low.

"And does the young Prince know the tragic history of the Jade Throne? He may be fired with a great love for the land of his forefathers. He may crave the privilege of again uniting his fathers people---his own people by birth---under monarchic rule, and by so doing bring about a state of contentment that has been lost to us under Bassio's oppressive dictatorship. He may want to be the man that our King should be, but does he know the terrible price that he must pay for the privilege of being Granzart's King and seyvor?"

"He, of course, knows nothing of the Jade Throne's wretched history," returned Cedric quickly. "Count Monray may see fit to tell him certain things; but I question if he will deem it wise to confide wholly in the young prince. That would invite complications and possible defeat of the Loyalists' plans."

"You feel, then, if the young Prince knew the history of the Jade Throne---"

"If he knew all, I fear he would follow in the footsteps of his father, weighing the power of being King against the satisfaction of being manly and upright.

And with his democraric American ideas he most likely would do as his father did before him. Granzart would then suffer through being left without its King. That is a thing that must not come about at any costs. Let the youth revel in the glories of being King. Even if the Jade Throne begins to sap his idea of what constitutes manliness and virtue, let us show no great concern. Is it not better that one youth be sacrikiced than a whole nation be disintegrated?"

The two servants passed on down the corridor leaving Dick stupefied and amazed. His mind was the battle-ground of a hundred conflicting thoughts. The conversation of Cedtic and Arring had revealed many things to him; yet these things were of such dynamic proportions, as they effected his life, that he was slow in adjusting his mind to an orderly view of the amazing situation.

There were moments when Dick was prompted to cry out: "Oh, it cannot be true!" Yet there was a vague something inside of him that answered: "It IS true. Though you have been brought into the Kingdom of Granzart under circumstances of most unusual proportions, your position as King is a matter-of-fact climax to the adventure."

A King! Again Dick thrilled at the thought. And he seemed to loose himself

in an atmosphere of pleasing meditation. Truly a colorful future lay ahead of him. Experiences, the like of which he had never before dreamed, would come to him. It would be a novel thing to have his every wish gratified! As King he would be within his rights in expecting that. A pleasing thought, surely.

Then there came to Dick a more earnest view of things. A King's life was not wholly a round of pleasure. There would be dangers and responsibilities. If it were to be his privilege to guide the destinies of a nation, then he must do so with justice to all, forgetting his own selfish desires and directing his every action in ways that were right.

It is a strange thing, in view of the servants' conversation, that Dick felt no dread of the Jade Throne. This was probably due to the fact that he was wholly without superstition. With characteristic American confidence and boyancy, he quite dismissed The Jade throne from his picture of things as they touched on his future. He would manage that all right, was his thought. No doubt the servants had exaggerated things. Even if there were a foundation of truth to the story there was no occasion for concern; and surely bravery of the right sort would carry him through. In that view of things, Dick, on the instant, seemed very

courageous, indeed. There came to him a quiet confidence in his personal safety. Was he not King? He scrambled to his feet and came openly down the stairs, walking with a new dignity that set well on him at the moment. He seemed in every way to be master of the situation. Arriving at the foot of the stairs, he passed on down the corridor. Soon he came to a great closed door in front of which two guards were stationed. They drew their bayonets and one demanded: "Who are you to dare to approach the sacred chamber of the Jade Throne?"

"I am Richard Froman, your King," said Dick simply. "Please stand aside and let me pass."

At Dick's words the guard permitted his bayonet to clatter to the floor. His eyes pictured mingled amazement and fear. He plainly was on the point of throwing himself imploringly at Dick's feet, but the latter prevented that by passing on through the door which the second guard had the presence of mind to open for him.

Dick found himself in a vast room. Through a dome-like roof came soft shafts of diffused sunlight, and when he glanced upward he thought for a moment that the dome was a single mammoth iridescent jewel. Then it came to him that the jewel-like effect was made possible by the sun's rays playing through the

stained glass prisms. He advanced gingerly, mindful of the soft texture of the rugs that covered the polished floor; mindful of the rare and beautiful paintings that adorned the walls and the gorgeous draperies of purple cloth, edged with golden fringe and decorated with golden tassels. At the far end of the room the softened sunlight played on what at first appeared to be a great green lizard, raised on its haunches, its fore-feet extended, its hideous mouth partly open, as though it saw its prey within reach and was all prepared to hurl itself forward. Dick gave a gasp as he slowly approached the lizard and discovered that he was viewing for the first time the mysterious Jade Throne of the kingdom of his forefathers'. The lizard appeared to be carved from a solid block of jade. To be seated on this strange throne, one would appear to be literally in the monster's fearful embrace, because the seat of the throne was a hollow in the creature's stomach, its wicked-looking head overhanging the seat thus created, its fore-feet acting as arm-rests. Its eyes appeared to be rubies of astonishing size and luster. As Dick regarded the unusual creation it seemed to him that the eyes blinked at him, then sparkled with renewed fire. So this was the Jade Throne? Truly a hideous thing, thought Dick. Yet its every line reflected rare genius and

it held a definite fascination. It was positioned on a dais of four steps, set out from the wall so that it was possible for one to walk entirely around the throne, and Dick did this, finding himself before what appeared to be a private curtained entrance. He drew aside the draperies and recoiled with an involuntary gasp when a japanese noiselessly stepped forth. The man bent low and murmured in perfect english:

"My King, his excellency, Count Monray, has been greatly distressed over your disappearance. To learn that you have escaped harm will bring him happiness and peace of mind. You will find him in your chamber, most excellent King. I am Jetto, your personal servant. Permit me to guide you." Without hesitation, Dick followed the man the length of a short passageway which had no side doors and opened at the end into a magnificent chamber. Here he found Count Monray. The man was pacing the floor, his swarthy face registered great agitation. At sight of Dick he gave a glad cry and came quickly forward with outstretched hands.

"I feared the guards--imbeciles that many of them are!--had captured and killed you. For hours we have been searching for you. Byoa managed to get word to me that you were in the west corridor, but when I visited the place I found no

trace of you."

"Byoa is alive?" Dick cried, happy for the moment in the thought that disaster had spared his brave and trustworthy companion.

"Byoa is being held in the castle dungeon; but shortly I will manage to bring about his release," returned the Count.

Dick told the Count how he had escaped from the corridor through the opening in the ceiling. He did not, however, repeat the conversation he had overheard between Arring and Cedric. He felt that to keep this information to himself gave him somewhat of an advantage. He knew not what lay ahead of him in this strange adventure, and elected to pretend ignorance of certain things. He inquired at an early moment:

"Count Monray, is it true that my father was at one time King of this country?"

The question took the count by surprise, but he quickly regained his composure and bowing, answered gently:

"Yes; your father was indeed our King."

"And did he voluntarily give up his throne?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"You call me 'Your Majesty'. Is it true that I am to become King of this country, with full approval of my father?" The Count again bowed low. A queer tremor passed through Dick. "But why did my father never mention this to me?" he quest-

ioned.

Jetto was hovering in the background, busying himself with some garments of quaint design. The Count motioned him from the room, then turned to Dick, his face picturing with great agitation.

"Richard, the hour has come when you must know more of what lies before you. It was your father's wish that these things be kept from you until you were in this very room. This was his chamber, Richard. He spent many hours here--unhappy hours, in the main." The man's voice trembled as a picture from out of the past rose before him. He controlled his emotions and continued: "I loved your father, not as my king, but as my friend and companion. Quite all the things that gladdened or troubled him he confided in me; and when he fled to America I was the one man in Granzart who was advised of his plans and intentions. Those plans, Richard, have effected you from the hour of your birth. Your father felt it his duty to Granzart that he give you over to the land of his birth and heritage, this when you had arrived at a suitable age. Through the years that you have come under his influences he has been preparing you for the things that will touch on and shape your life here in Granzart, as King. He has taught you to be courageous, for you will

need courage of rare qualities; he has guided you along the paths in action and thought that lead always to that which is right and just, because as King you will do nothing that is not wholly right and just. He has carried your thoughts above dread born of superstition, because, it was such a dread that filled his hours with wretchedness and misery. He wanted you to be above such fear.

"Your father, Richard, ascended the throne as Frazonia III when he was very young and at a time when the shock of your grandfather's tragic death was weighing on his troubled mind. Your grandfather---Frazonia II---was found dead, seated on the Jade Throne. His face was frozen in death lines of great terror. This recalled to mind that your great-grandfather, Frazonia I, a very cruel man, had died in the same mysterious manner. You can see how this effected your father. He was nervous and unstrung; and always kept before him the thought that the Jade Throne carried the unending curse of the sculptor who created it. Your father was obsessed with the hallucination that the Jade Throne---Sometimes called the Lizard Throne---was exercising an evil influence over his life, dulling his judgement in favor of that which was wicked and unmanly. Yes, and your father had the morbid feeling that he would come

to death on the Jade Throne, the same as your grandfather and great-grandfather. You can readily see why he in time fled to America.

"That happened years ago, Richard. And since that time Granzart has suffered under the tyrannical rule of a cunning, ambitious hunchback of low birth, Bassio, by name, who poses as a representative of the commoners. He calls himself dictator. He is a villain of the deepest dye. Those citizens that favor a monarchy are known as Loyalists. For years the Loyalists have looked forward to the time when Granzart would again know a King, though only a chosen few knew of your existence. It is generally conceded throughout the Kingdom that once a descendant of the royal family is placed on the throne the entire nation will rally to his support, ending Bassio's dictatorship forever. You can see where your duty lies, Richard. Granzart needs you---you alone can save the country of your ancestors and bring peace and happiness to the great multitudes of people who are suffering under Bassio's rule. You have the moral strength that your father lacked---you have none of his superstition and ill-founded fear. The Jade Throne carries no obstacles for you. Yours is to be a great and glorious reign! Oh, Richard, a wonderful future lies before you! And always remember that I am

at your command---my King!"

Throughout the Count's long recital, Dick had listened with a supreme interest. He was fascinated and thrilled. He wanted time to think the thing over, so had only commonplace questions to ask. Then the Count left him alone. Jetto came into the room, very softly, and made it clear to Dick that he was to don certain garments that had been laid out for him. Dick rebelled at this. He disliked to picture himself in a jacket with biscuit-like sleeves, wearing white silk stockings and slippers with hugh buckles. Yet Jetto gravely stated this was expected of him.

Richard Froman ruefully regarded the quaint clothing that Jetto expected him to wear. The trousers were of black satin and came only to the knees. There were white silk stockings, low shoes with hugh golden buckles, and a quaint jacket with biscuit-like sleeves. About the collar was a cloud of fluffy lace. It appeared very feminine to Dick, and was wholly displeasing to him.

"Gee! If I wear this outfit I'll look like a flunkey in a musical comedy," he complained.

"Musical comedy----comedy?" said Jetto, looking puzzled.

"Oh, I mean a show," said Dick a bit irritably. But though he in no way favored the unusual clothing, he permitted Jetto

to help him into the garments. When he looked into the mirror he laughed wryly.

"I may look somewhat like a King; but I'm two hundred years behind the times. Kings wear ordinary clothing these days, and not ruffled toggerly like this."

"Your people are simple in their tastes and like to hold to old customs," explained Jetto softly as he moved about Dick, patting the biscuit-like sleeves and arranging the elaborate collar.

"Old customs, you say? And will I be expected to follow other old customs, associated with Kings, and order people's heads cut off?"

"If you so will, your Magesty."

"Not me! Say, Jetto."

"Yes, Your Magesty?"

"If you love your little King, get him a hot-dog sandwich."

"Hot-dog---that is---yes--" The Japanese was dazed.

"Something to eat," said Dick. "Food; chow; grub. Catch on, Jetto? I'm starving."

"Oh, a thousand pardons!" murmured Jetto, immediately leaving the room.

Dick wondered about, displaying keen cuerosity in his strange and unusual surroundings. So he was to sleep in this great four-post bed with its elaborate satin canopy! And he was to seat himself on these fragile-legged chairs and com-

pose his letters at this odd, hand carved writing desk that resembled an old melodeon until the cover was raised and the purpose of the article revealed. Paintings of grim faced men and proud--looking ladies adorned the walls. Dick examined the paintings minutely. He came to one that interested him more than all the rest. It pictured a youth, but Dick readily recognized his father. There was something intensely human about the painting. The eyes, as they looked forth from the canvas, were warm and appealing; yet in their depths there lurked a definite something that suggested unhappiness. When Dick turned away he was sober and thoughtful. Would the Jade Throne bring unhappiness into his life, too?

CHAPTER V

The hours that followed were memorable ones to Dick. He watched the light of day fade into mellow twilight, and the twilight into the blackness of night. Life without the castle seemed to diminish and die, even as the birds sang lustily in the ruddy rays of the setting sun, then went silently to their roosts. The guards in the grey uniforms became lost in the gloom. A few feeble lights appeared in the castle grounds, but to Dick, looking forth from one of the castle windows, they seemed only to intensify the darkness. The whole atmosphere was charged with mystery, tense yet elusive. Dick was thrilled under the spell of the moment. Truly a wonderful chapter was being written into his life! Maybe it is well that he, at that moment, had no intuition of the dynamic climax that was impending. He felt that he had reached the peak of his adventure, and little realized

that under cover of the lengthening shadows, forces were closing in that were to cause him the bitter anguish and bring an end to his adventure in tragedy of terrible proportions.

As darkness settled in, Jetto, always attentively near, lighted a number of candles in quaint candlesticks, and the softened light that filled the room brought a certain measure of peace and contentment to Dick. He longed for companionship and friendly conversation.

"Don't you have electric lights in this country?" he asked the Japanese, as the latter busied himself with a burning taper, passing from candle to candle.

"Only in Laurentine, our capital city, Your Majesty."

"Well, as king, I think one of my first jobs will be to build a few power plants," declared Dick. What a quaint country, he thought! In America, his life hourly touched by conveniences, it never had occurred to him that there were places in the world where civilized people of wealth and distinction still used candles. He wondered if Granzart was without telephones and telegraph lines. When he put the question to Jetto, the servant gravely informed him that there were a few telephones in Laurentine.

Dick laughed.

"Jetto, I'm beginning to have a great

curiosity to visit Laurentine. It must be a very exciting place--with electric lights and telephones and everything! I presume there are automobiles there, too?"

"Yes, Sir Partri owns a motor vheicle. But it is quite old and makes such queer noises that he rarely uses it."

"And who might Sir Partri be?"

"A loyalist leader, Your Majesty."

"Will I come in contact with him, Jetto?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Your Majesty! He frequently comes here to the castle to confer with Count Monray. He is a very brave man, and his patriotism has gained for him the intense hatred of Bassio."

It had been dark for some time and the clock that ticked noisily in one corner of the room pointed to the hour of eight-thirty when Count Monray entered. He appeared graver than usual, and there was a tenseness about him that caused Dick a bit of anxiety. Was trouble brewing?

"The Countess Delmar has requested me to act as your guide and bring you to the acorn room where dinner is being served," the man stated. "You will enjoy meeting the Countess, Richard. For a great many years she has had charge of the personnel here in the castle. She loved your father as a mother would love a favorite son. The dear lady was quite

overcome with emotion when she learned of your presence here. You will find her both fascinating and interesting. If you are ready for dinner---"

"I'm ready---very much so," put in Dick quickly. "It seems ages since I had a real honest-to-goodness meal. Jetto brought me some sandwiches, but they were little more than an aggravation. Maybe I will frighten the Countess with my awful appetite!"

"I fancy that most anything you could do would please her." With this remark the Count gently waved Dick from the room, then caught step with him and the two walked down the corridor that Dick had traversed earlier in the day. Very shortly they passed into a quaint room, the wainscoting and ceiling beams of which were carved to represent acorns and oak leaves. Between the beams the ceiling was tinted a delicate green. It reminded Dick of a forest glen, and so held his interest that he quite forgot about his odd clothing, though his buckled shoes and lace collar had caused him keen embarrassment until the moment.

An elderly lady came forward as the two entered the room. First, Dick observed that her hair was quite grey and that time had touched her face with lines that denied the youthful warmth of her blue eyes. She wore a sweeping gown of black

satin, and at her throat were diamonds and rubies woven into a necklace. This display of precious stones quite took Dick's breath away. The lady curtsied low, and a bit uncertain as to how he should respond, Dick finally decided to follow the directions of his heart and held out both hands. Always he had been attracted to genteel elderly people, and he felt, on the instant, that he was going to love this picturesque old lady very much indeed.

The woman's eyes filled with tears as she took Dick's outstretched hands and clasped them tightly. She trembled with emotion, and seemed in need of the steadying arm that the Count quickly held out to her.

"I am a silly old thing," she said after a moment. "But I--I loved your father, and I have missed him these many lonely, trying years. His absence has meant a great loss to Granzart; but a greater loss, even, to me. You resemble your father closely; and I have you greet me with open hands, one of his many lovable mannerisms, seems like a chapter out of the past."

"How stupid of us!" cut in the Count with exaggerated gayety. "Look! We are letting the soup grow cold." A servant stood attentively near and the Count touched the man on the arm. "Dextof, is it

not true that we will be deserving of your ill will if we longer keep dinner waiting?"

"Dinner is served, Your Excellency," the servant responded, his mobile face devoid of expression. He drew a chair for Dick but the latter first seated the Countess, who rewarded him with a gentle pressure of her wrinkled hand.

Only when Dick was seated did the Count take his place at the table.

Throughout the meal the Countess chattered with the vivacity of a young girl, relating many things of interest pertaining to Granzart. She told about the winter season, when the mountains were snow-bound and the royal house-hold took up its abode in Laurentine. She pictured the winter festivities of the capital city, the great formal ball, given at the royal palace; the ballet and opera; the jolly week-end house parties at the hunting lodges of the nobility.

"This is indeed an interesting country," said Dick, thrilled under the vivid word pictures. "It is strange that in all my school work I never heard of such a Kingdom as Granzart. I have no idea where I am; whether I am in Europe or Africa or South America. But I assume I am in Europe. Indeed, I am curious to know just where Granzart lies according to the map. And I am anxious to read the history of

this cuntry." He turned to the Count. "Tomorrow, if you will, Count Monray, I would like to have you show me on the map just where Granzart is located; and I would like to have some books giving the country's history."

There was a clatter as the Count's fork fell to his plate. For Just an instant he stared at Dick as though nonplused; then he regained his composure. The Countess hid her face in her napkin, from which came queer sounds. Dick was uncomfortable. Was she choking or laughing? Surely, though, she could not be laughing! What was there in his remark to provoke mirth? Yet it was plain that his request HAD momentarily dismayed the Count. Dick was puzzled over the matter.

"I will try and find the books you have requested," the Count spoke up; and Dick caught him glowering at the Countess. "We have no great library here in the castle. I am not certain that the books are here---"

"But you can get them for me; even if you have to send to Laurentine," said Dick.

"I will see to it that you have them," the Count promised.

As the meal progressed, Dick was thoughtful. He had a feeling that his request for the historical books had taken

the Count by surprise. But why? It was to be expected that a kingdom like Granzart would have books covering its political and geographical history. Assuming that such books were available, was it possible that the Count was trying to keep them from him? But, even so, what was there in this to provoke the Countess' mirth? Indeed, it was a puzzling affair! But one thing Dick was determined: He would make it his business to see that the books that he requested were secured for his reading. He would not let the Count put him off. Somehow he had the feeling that the man would seek to avoid delivering those books.

Dick was still revolving the matter in his mind when Dextof was summoned to the door and a moment later returned to the Count's side with a note on a silver tray. The Count went white when he read the note. With a mumbled apology he arose from the table and hastily left the room. Dick was troubled. What had happened? He openly inquired of the Countess if she had any idea what had taken the Count away, but she avoided his question and with her conversational vivacity sought to direct his thoughts into other channels.

When the meal came to an end the Countess took Dick's arm and the two passed along the corridor. They were shortly

met by the Count, who came forward with tense, nervous steps. Brusquely he requested the Countess to excuse Dick, and led the latter to the royal chamber. When they were closeted in the room the man said:

"Richard, a most astonishing thing has happened. This afternoon three of the Royal Guards stopped a mysterious coach passing through the mountains and learned that the solitary passenger in the coach was none other than Bassio. He was in disguise, but his deformed back readily led to the establishing of his identity. Feeling that his presence so near the castle boded ill for the carrying out of our plans, the guards decided to take Bassio and his driver into custody. Both are now confined in the lower dungeons. I feel that grave dangers are banking about us and have called an emergency meeting of the Loyalist Leaders.

Messengers have been dispatched to summon the twelve noblemen who complete the Loyalist Council, and they will be here before midnight. Granzart, I fear, has never written a more dramatic hour. For aught I know, we may be on the brink of internal revolution. There is no way of gauging what Bassio's followers and hirelings will do if they arrive at the cause of their leader's disappearance. It is well, Richard, that you prepare

yourself for tremendous developments. This night may witness the assassination of Bassio, because I feel that his death is necessary to assure the safety of your regime. The council will hold its meeting in the Throne Room. It will be expected of you that you attend, Richard."

"You---you mean as King?" Dick gasped.

Count Monray bowed low.

"As King," he murmured.

It would be difficult to picture Dick's state of mind. Never had he been so dazed and bewildered. And above all else a terrible fear gripped him that in appearing before the Loyalist Council he would unwittingly do some absurd thing that would cause the ridicule of the men to descend upon him. He was intensely proud, and sensitive in no small measure. It was his determination to give to this strange country the best he had in him---his life if need be---but he was fearful that his position as King would demand of him qualities and capacities he did not possess.

There was also another thought that brought Dick bitter unhappiness. His love for America was deeply-rooted. Always he had gloried in being an American. It meant a great deal to him. Now he was sacrificing his American citizenship. True, he was to become a King---an honor and greatness bestowed upon few

people---but it seemed to him that the thing he was loosing far outmeasured the thing he was gaining. Duty, though, pointed but one way. It was his father's wish that he become King of this country, beset with superstition and political strife. He would not fall under the burden of trust imposed on him. He would do his best--he could do no more than that. At this thought his tortured nerves seemed to settle into a certain measure of resignation.

While Dick was buisy with his thoughts, the Count instructed Jetto to bring out the crown jewels.

"It is tradition in our country that no ruler of Granzart shall ascend the Jade Throne without wearing the State Crown," he explained to Dick. Then he excused himself, stating that he would return later.

As the door closed upon the Count, Jetto stepped to a place where the wall was paneled in a most peculiar manner. He pressed a secret spring and one of the panels slid back, revealing a hidden recess, from which he produced a locked metal box. When the box was opened, Dick saw within a golden crown set with jewels that glittered and sparkled in the softened light.

Dick took the crown into his hands. What a beautiful thing! The gems were

probably worth an immense fortune. There also was a scepter in the box. Dick handled it gingerly and reverently. It was the symbol of his authority!

Slowly the minutes dragged along. Life within the castle settled into a definite quietness. Only occasionally was a footfall heard in the corridor beyond the closed door. Dick paced the room. It seemed that he could not keep from looking at the clock. He saw the hands climb to the hour of ten, then eleven. From eleven to midnight seemed a long, long journey.

As the clock signaled the hour of twelve, the Count returned. In a low tense voice he informed Dick that the twelve noblemen had arrived and were ready to enter into secret session in the Throne Room. Something within Dick seemed to shiver and crash. The minute was at hand for him to accept the crown of his ancestors' and ascent the mysterious Jade Throne of Granzart! In anticipation it had seemed a thing of dynamic possibilities. In realization the colorful picture that anticipation had conjured up seemed to fade into a puny tinge.

Jetto gently placed the crown on Dick's head and gave the scepter to the boy's trembling hand. For an instant he looked into Dick's face compassionately--turned away---then gripped Dick's hand and mur-

mured feelingly:

"Oh, My King! Have no fear. There are about you friends who will protect you; if necessary, die for you!"

Dick rewarded the faithful servant with a pressure of the hand, then followed the Count into the passageway leading to the Throne Room. Soon, as in a dream, he found himself in the vast room, lighted seemingly with a thousand burning tapers. Before the throne, which glimmered like a great green monster in the softened light of the burning tapers, was a semicircle of thirteen chairs. Twelve rugged, grim-faced men stood with bowed heads, their hands resting on the hilts of their swords, as Dick was led to the throne by the Count. When Dick was seated on the throne the Count said:

"Brother Loyalists of the order of the Ivy Leaf, it is our privilege to greet our gracious King, Richard, son of Frazonia III, who now ascends Granzart's Jade Throne informally, but who will, within a few hours, I hope, be officially proclaimed Granzart's King. Let us, my brothers, do him homage as loyal subjects." At this, each man came forward, knelt on the lower step of the dais and unbuckling his sword placed it at Dick's feet. It was a solemn proceeding; and when it came to an end the swords formed quite a heap on the dais. Count Monray then acted as spokesman and

said:

"My Brothers, I think you all know why you have been called into secret council. Bassio has been captured by two of our guards and now writhes in confinement in the castle dungeon. That he was in disguise at the time of his capture, and taken nearby the castle, would suggest that he came here with no good purpose in mind as regards our secret plans. We must decide to-night if we are to dispose of him, and how. I will say this, my Brothers: I feel that Granzart's safety and the safety of our King will never be assured until Bassio is put to death. Sir Partri, you have come from Laurentine this night. What is the situation there?"

The nobleman addressed arose and said gravely:

"Your Majesty, and my beloved Brothers, there is apparent, among Bassio's followers a very definite tenseness and I imagine that by now there is grave unrest in certain circles over his disappearance. His soldiers may at any moment take it upon themselves to come here to determine for themselves if he is being held captive."

"Do you feel we are strong enough to resist them?" the Count put in, anxiety showing in his face.

"Not if they felt they were fighting for release of their leader," Sir Partri

responded gravely. "But if they were convinced of his death---"

"Bassio must die!" another one of the noblemen put in with great passion; and soon each man in the semicircle was saying: "Bassio must die!"

"My King, what is your pleasure in the matter?" the Count inquired, addressing Dick.

The latter gave a gasp. Until this moment he had been intensely interested in the proceedings, but as an onlooker. Now it would appear that he would be drawn into the matter. He trembled at the thought of what lay behind the Count's words. These men were expecting him to take sides with them or openly oppose them. He could not, with Granzart's interests at heart, oppose them. What they were contemplating was plainly for Granzart's good. But could he agree with them? Could he say: "Yes, let us take a man's life!"

"Why I---I know so little of what is best," he faltered.

"You are not averse to our disposing of Bassio?"

"Are you asking me to condemn this man to death?" cried Dick, great beads of perspiration coming out on his forehead and streaming down his white, cold face.

"Your approval or disapproval is not a deciding factor, my King," The Count

hastened to explain. "The matter will be put to a vote; you will have an equal vote with the rest of us and you may vote as you think best. The issue will be determined by the majority. If the Crown voices no objection I will call for a rising vote. "

"I have no objection," Dick said simply.

"Then, my Brothers we will determine by a rising vote whether or not Bassio is to be put to death. Those in favor of this action, as necessary to the safety of the Crown, will arise. Those opposed will remain seated." In an instant, almost every man was on his feet. Dick was the only one seated. For a moment he wavered, then he, too, stood erect.

"It has been decreed by the council that Bassio shall die," The Count announced solemnly. "And that he must die at the hands of one of our number as gathered here is imperative, because to engage a hired assassin would be hazardous. No one outside of this Council must ever learn of what has transpired here this night. I shall prepare the death ballot. There will, as usual, be thirteen white balls and one red ball. The Brother who draws the red ball will be duly instructed and protected, and at his hand this night Bassio shall be dispatched."

Terror seized Dick. Fourteen balls! Thirteen white balls and one red one!

Red, the color of blood! What if he drew the red ball? In that event would it be expected of him--- Oh, what a terrible thought! To take a man's life! He trembled as though held in the grip of a violent chill. His eyes reflected the fear that he felt as he watched the Count pass from one member of the order to another, each man reaching into a small black box, held high above his head, withdrawing a small object that he tightly gripped in his hand. The Count came to Dick, and the latter, as in a terrible dream, reached into the box, felt two balls, and withdrew one. When the Count had withdrawn the last ball Sir Partri said in a solem voice: "White!" The man next to him responded in the same way, then the next one, until each man in the semicircle had said: "White!" The Count gave a gasp and looked at the ball in his hands. He took a step toward the throne as Dick tottered to his feet. The boy uttered a cry that penetrated to the far corners of the room. The cry was filled with terror and agony and fear.

"Oh, I cannot----I cannot!" he cried.

"Dont ask me to take a human life. Do with me as you will---anything you wish if it will save Granzart;but don't ask me to take a human life. I cannot do that, not for all the Kingdoms in the world will

I do that. Oh, America! I am calling to you; I want you; I want your freedom and peace and safety. I thought it would be wonderful to be a King; but if a King must sacrifice his honor, I want to be just a plain American. Oh, I---I cannot do what you expect me to do! I----" His voice, trembling with passion, trailed off into space, and the men before him cried out in unfeigned dismay when he came to the very edge of the dais and fell forward on his face, Granzart's crown shedding its rare gems as it clattered to the floor.

"Good heavens! Is he dead?" cried the Count kneeling beside Dick, his hand feeling for the boy's heart.

"This is tragedy!" said Sir Partri. We hardly expected this."

"He has fainted," announced the Count, a world of relief in his voice. "Don't gather in too closely, men. Call the Jap and have him bring some water. Collect the balls, before he comes to."

"I will," offered Sir Partri; and he went from man to man until he had collected THIRTEEN RED BALLS. The fourteenth red ball he found tightly gripped in Dick's hand. As he placed the black box on a nearby table a commotion took place at the door. Jetto came into the room, and others came after him.

It is night. Without the windows of professor Froman's library the shadows

hang low, carrying the trees and shrubbery into a measureless gloom.

But within the library there was light and life---even in the tired eyes of Dick Froman as he listens to the story that his father is unfolding. Slouched in a deep, leather-cushioned chair by the library table is Gaston Moran, now seemingly grimmer and greyer than ever.

"Then there really is no Granzart?" said Dick slowly.

"No Richard," his father replied. "As I say, it was all a test to prove, as best we could, whether Mr. Moran is justified in the theory that criminals are such because of preference; or whether I am right in contending that the environment is a dominant factor in creating criminal impulses."

"We took a supreme condition---the heritage of power as vested in kings. Would you, supposedly a king, stoop to degradation to retain your kingly position, knowing that your environment was sapping away your idea of right? Or would you relinquish your kingly heritage and flee from the evil influence of your throne?"

"Whether I am right, or Mr. Moran, is a matter for speculation. The test, Richard, was not carried through as we planned. When you fainted, I did not have the courage to continue."

"And Bassio and the Count--"

"Hired actors," the man explained.
"The 'castle' is the summer home of Mrs. Porter Faraday, a lady I know well, who took a deep interest in the test, and even consented to appear as the Countess Delmar."

"But the magic chest---"

"You were simply kept in the chest till daylight, Richard. It was swung about on cables, making you think it was moving through the air."

Dick gave a long sigh.

"Let's not have any more such tests," said he with a wry smile. "It isn't any fun being a king."

THE END

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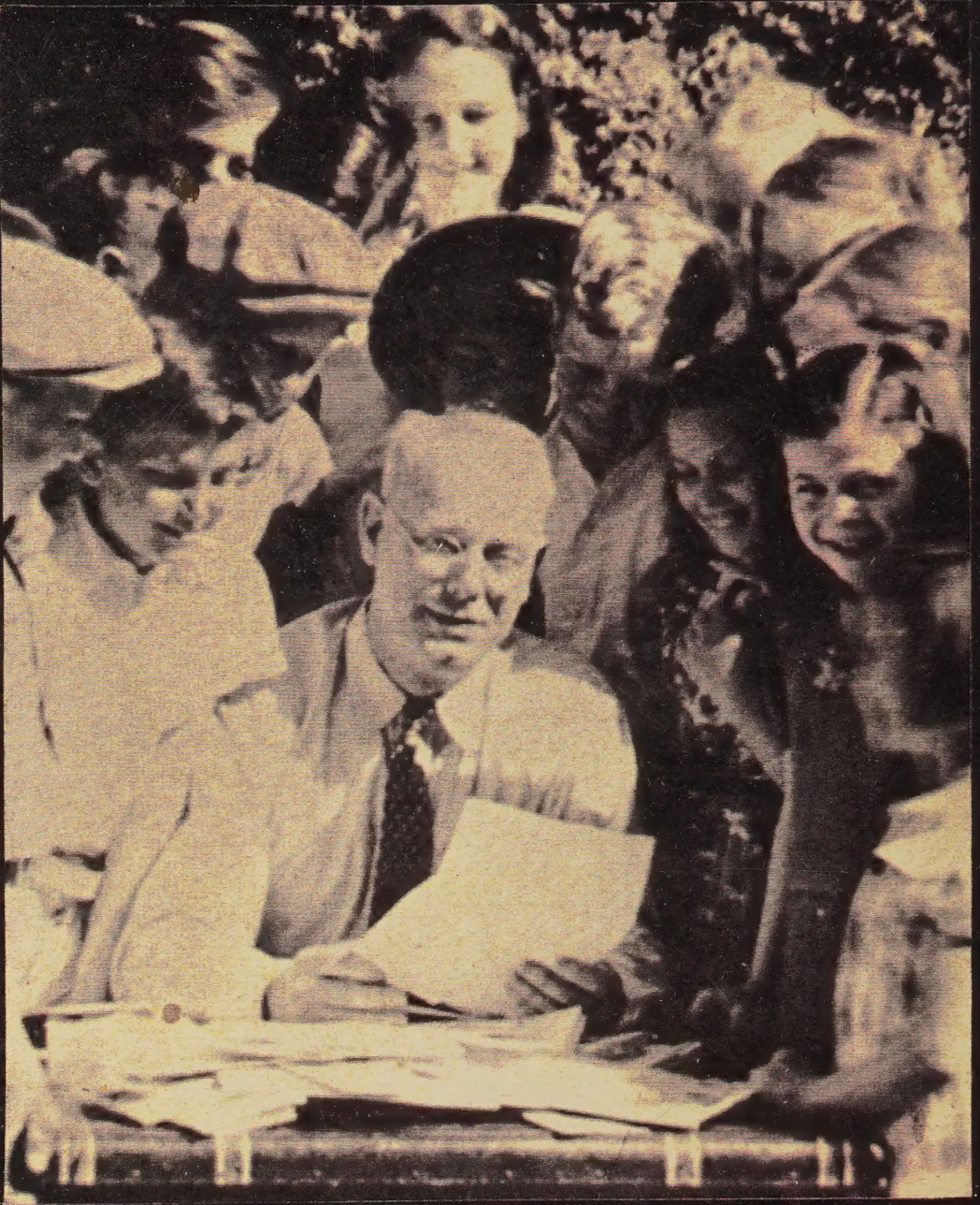
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